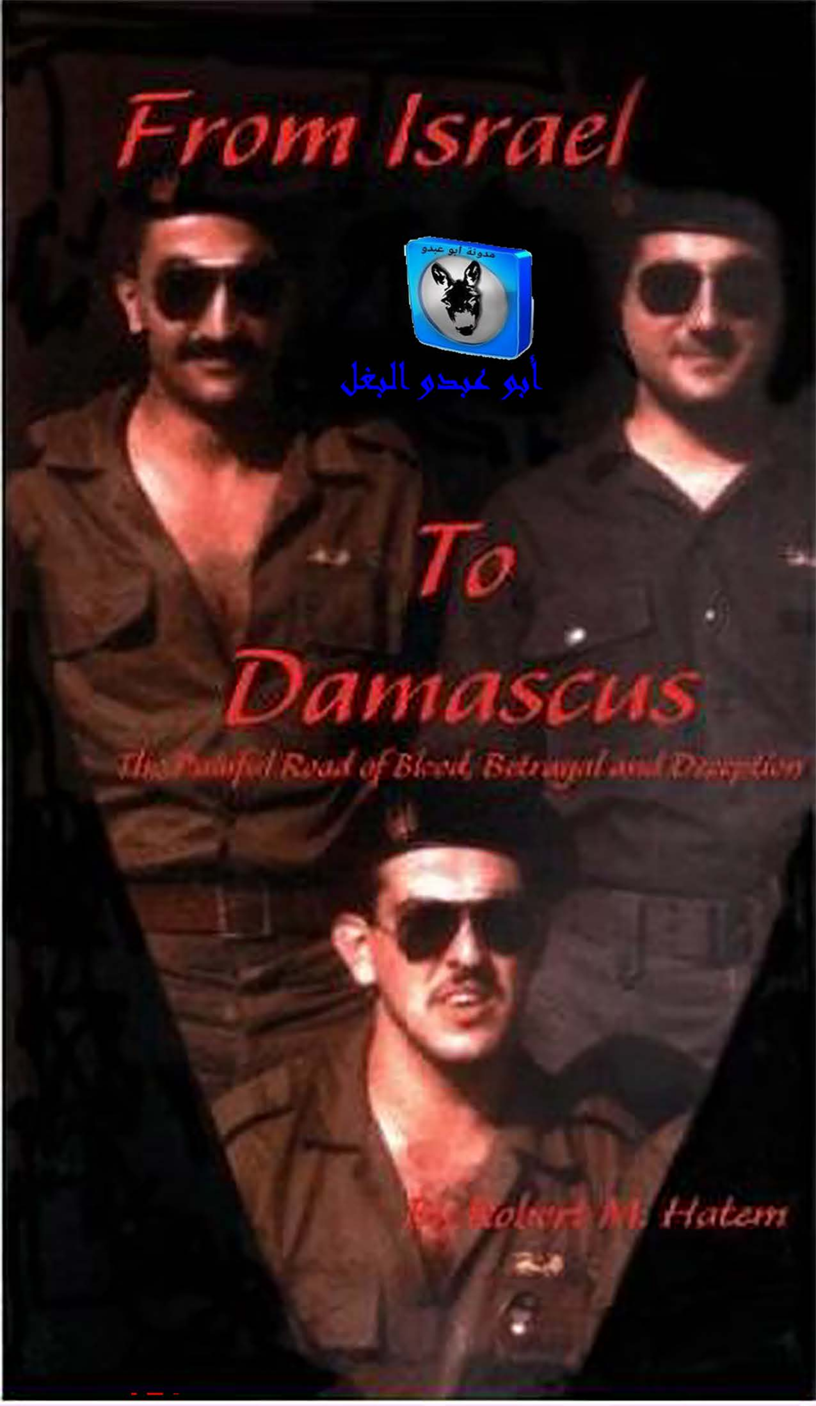

From Israel
مدونة ابو عبدو
أبو عبدو البغل
To
Damascus
The Painful Road of Blood, Betrayal and Deception
By Robert M. Hatem

From Israel to Damascus

CHAPTER 1: 1975 - The Beginning of the War

It was 1969 in Lebanon. I was 13 years old and all we could talk about was Lebanon's politics and the building military action in our homeland. Lebanon was and continues to be rich in history, steeped in violence. It is a land filled with a people who believe in their convictions and the preservation of their lands. The Lebanese people are active members of their communities and participated in the shaping of our homelands. In 1969, the fever was rising at a rapid pitch as the world watched a nation in turmoil.

The Kataeb Party, then in control of the Christian Lebanese section of Lebanon, psychologically prepared the Lebanese people for had worsened military and political conditions. The opposing Party leaders continued to undermine the political authorities, the power of the President of Lebanon, the armed forces in Lebanon and the internal security forces.

The first sign of real trouble and escalating events came in 1973 when skirmishes broke out in the Capital of South Lebanon Sidon. Clashes between the Christian Lebanese army and the Fedayeen turned into bloody battles. The boys in the Lebanese Christian neighborhoods were holding regular meetings, reading and conditioning themselves for a state of war. It was in 1974 that the intensity of the situation in Lebanon became clear for me as well as all Christian people. The political situation was becoming unbearable and we were all jittery.

While the country was experiencing unrest during that year, I had a violent argument with my parents and left my home on Ghannoum Street in Ayn Remaneh to live with my grandparents who lived in Furn El Shebbak. My parents' village is Ghabeh in Jbeil. Byblos is where my grandfather was the Mukhtar or Mayor. My parents grew up in Funr El Shebbak, Beirut. Like all the youth of that region, I was attached to my quarter and highly involved in my communities needs and problems, its joys and sorrows.

I was born in Tahwitet Furn el Shebbak in 1956. I could not be subdued, and insubordinate rebel, who spent his early childhood shifting from one private school (Freres of Furn el Shebbak) to the another. I spent time at the Peres Antonins of Baabda moving from my parents' home to my grandparents' home, in search of greater freedom of action and ways to unwind, in an all out hostile atmosphere of speculations and growing danger. I would not have known that a within a few short years, I would play an integral part of Lebanon's history.

On February 27, 1975, a Moslem Sunni leader, Maarouf Saad was killed during a fishermen demonstration. This signaled the beginning of unrest in my country. The event incited the people The two sides of the war were shaping up. The Christian

community members of Lebanon supported the State and legal forces. The Fedayeen and their Moslem supporters squared against us. The Lebanon army was neutralized prior to its disintegration and members banned from South Lebanon. The whole area went under Syro-Palestinian Syrian authority.

The Cause was born. The Christian neighborhoods were literally suffocating as they were shut in by major Palestinian camps swarming into the region with overly armed and overheated Fedayeen men. The inhabitants of Ayn Remaneh became the only outlet from which the Lebanese Christians could breathe. Their pride in this new position grew. Ayn Remaneh was the only direct passageway between the camps of Sabra and Jisr Al Bacha.

I was barely 19 years old when I found myself in the middle of massive turmoil and big military and political action. My story began on a sunny Sunday morning, April 13, 1975. The whole neighborhood of Ayn Remaneh / Furn el Shebbak was seething with excitement as the Kataeb Phalangist Party Chief Sheikh Pierre Gemayel was scheduled to inaugurate a new Church. To the Christian Lebanese people, Sheikh Pierre was the figurehead of the Christian Lebanese people, the man who opposed the Cairo Agreement with the Palestinians, and stood up against the Palestinian armed presence in Lebanon. That Sunday morning was foggy and hot. I, Robert Maroun Hatem, alias "Cobra", a 19-year-old Lebanese youth, was cast into the political and military arena of my country.

The Eastern neighborhoods of Ayn Remaneh and Furn el Shebbak were seething with excitement over the religious event. The Western neighborhoods were overheated with anger as they were burying their martyrs in an unprecedented display of force.

At 11 a.m. that morning, as the ceremony had ended, a white Fiat sped up from the Moslem Shiite side of the sector, opened machine gunfire on the crowd killing two men. One of the men was Joseph Abou Assi, Sheikh Pierre Gemayel's personal guard. Abou Assi was a notable Kataeb party member, loved and respected. He was the Chief of Al Sakhra, "The Rock" group assigned to protect the inner circle which consisted of Sheikh Pierre Gemayel and the Central Head Office of the Party together with Pierre and Fuad and Hilmy El Shartouni. Following the shooting, the crowds fled from the area leaving the streets deserted. Only a heavy feeling of mourning and oppressive expectancy remained.

At 12.30 p.m., a bus filled with armed Palestinians defiantly went down the same street scoffing at our disarray and anger. Their actions showed sheer provocation. The silence was broken by another burst of machine gunfire. The bus was smashed and the passengers on board killed. This was my first encounter with blood, violence and vengeance. It also triggered WAR in Lebanon.

At 10:00 p.m., as the community watched the events of the day in their homes on television, exchanging views on the morning's incident wondering whether or not there would be repercussions, mortar shells slammed Ayn Remaneh. Panic spread. Rumors

were not unfounded. The Palestinians were indeed dead set on slaughtering all the Christians!

In retaliation, a general mobilization was decreed by Sheikh Pierre Gemayel of the Kataeb Party and President Camille Chamoun of the Ahrar party. Other Christian groups soon followed making ready for war. Schools and Universities were closed. All the boys were pressed to join training camps run by the Kataeb in mountain areas.

I dashed headlong into the fight, but the red tape slowed my induction down. In my haste to join, my application was delayed. I was ready to fight. I was boiling with anger and excitement. Unable to hold out and wait for official confirmation into the army, I joined the Maronite League's Military faction later named "Tanzim." All I had to do was to pay 30 lebanese pounds for the cartridges, fill out a form and join up with my designated training camp of Watal Jaouz. Our military instructors were Abou Roy and his brother Pompidou, their family name is Mahfouz.

In the Tanzim, I was a tough reckless guy, smart, swift, and funny. I was instantly recruited to follow a higher training session with a group of daredevils later named the "Fakhreddine Battalion." We were stationed at our Headquarters situated in Sami Al Solh Street. This site borders Badaro which was considered a vital thoroughfare between Ayn Remaneh and Ashrafieh and Lourdes. It was also considered one of the main outlets of Ayn Remaneh, and placed under the command of a military leader known as Garrison, a tough guy who is now believed to be a Green Beret in the United States of America. From Sami Al Solh Street, we carried out commando raids beyond the newly established "Green Line" of Shiah. We terrorized the Palestinians and their allies; and, as such, safeguarded and boosted up the morale of the Christian inhabitants who had decided to stand their ground and remain home.

Sharp differences between the two leaders of the Tanzim, George Edwan and Abou Roy soon jammed our action. Disgusted with these internal conflicts between the two leader over personal interests and their political jealousies, I took off one evening and joined the Kataeb Section 104 of Furn El Shebbak led by Tony Mhanna alias "Abou Imad." That is where I was nicknamed "Cobra" after the brand of my gun I used in combat, a white United States Cobra.

It was Section 104 which was later sent to the Commercial Center, the Al Asswak Front where the most notorious and bloody "Grand Hotels" round of battles took place. The objective of the battles, at that time, was to retrace the Green Line beyond the Central Bank of Lebanon of which we had to take possession. In the Section 104, we learned to become regular army and to obey orders. "Execute the object" became our slogan. Our section was the spearhead of the Lebanese Resistance set up to survive and defend its sense of dignity and liberty.

While stationed at the Byblos hotel, some 20 meters from the Holiday Inn and the sector of the Port, the Palestinians and their Lebanese Moslem allies, known as the "Mourabitoons" attempted to cut us off from our supply line. Our faith kept us going in a

fierce battle of high and low ebbs, a fight between David and Goliath. The battle was a the nightmare. Despite the fierce fighting, our section held out.

On December 6, 1997, we were under the command of Joseph Saadd, also known as Ammo Joseph. It was under his command that the Black Saturday massacre was carried out. The attack was to avenge the death of Joseph Saadd two sons and his Fourth Bureau Chief who had been in charge of the military equipment and logistics. I later learned that a man called Elie Hobeika had personally participated in the Black Saturday massacres.

It was during the Battle of Beirut and between missions that I was introduced to the Begin group or "Crack Unit." This unit included Fuad Abou Nader, Amine Assouad, Sheikh Pierre Gemayel's grandsons, Massoud Ashkar also known as "Poussy", Elie Hobeika and Fadi Frame. All of these men were friends of Bachir Gemayel known as "El Bache."

The end of January, 1976 was nearing. We had been fighting for 60 days, living in hell. It was during our retreat from the Phoenicia Hotel and the Holiday Inn, that I had my first fit of rebellion and so did the boys! Instead of carrying out their initial mission, the patrol leaders operated under cover of night to load trucks with their looted booty from the fighting, while the boys, under the patrol leaders' command, secured the patrol leaders' protection. The boys returned to their posts themselves empty handed and quizzical. Betrayal and looting was common place.

During our final retreat to settle in Al Batone and Saradar Bank buildings, I finally decided to quit the "game" and go back to Furn Al Shebbak. The leader I had followed, Guy Helou, a tough and honest guy, was killed in Bab Idriss. The boys and I suspected a hitch, an internal conflict over the loot, at the highest level. I could not trust we I was following. As I learned later, internal Mafia battles were raging during the fighting. The Port of Beirut's 150 wharves had been looted and the Begin, including Elie Hobeika, were dispatched to halt the looting and close the main entrances of the port. Instead of stopping the looting, they got looted themselves and sacked the wharves of the goods.

Corruption spread in the ranks marking the first sign of betrayal of the Christian people and their cause. The war continued and so did the attempt to destroy the Lebanese Christians. Consumed by the war and fighting, I and the boys of Section 104; however, had no time to analyze the situation. Ceaseless fighting on the traditional Fronts kept us busy and our minds off of our feelings of building unrest. Then in June, 1976, we received orders from Sheikh Amine Gemayel, master of the Matn, to join the «Noumour», the Tigers, of Lebanon's President Camille Chamoun. The Noumour was commanded by President Chamoun's son, Dany Chamoun. The section was ordered to the Fronts of the Tell Al Zaatar camp. Following the downfall of the Quarantine and the Abattoir sector, our leaders were determined to drive the Palestinians out of their fortress and "clean up" the Christian sector of Beirut.

Former President Amine Gemayel, alias Anid, commanded the sector of the Matn. This region included Furn El Shebbak Ayn Remaneh who instructed the boys of Section 104 of Furn Al Shebbak to move down to the new triangular front of Tell Zaatar-Jisr Al Basha- Nabaa. There were already 30,000 Christian martyrs who had died, the fighting long and bitter, but fighting action revived our enthusiasm for the cause. We flung ourselves into the new challenge, forgetful of defeat and deceit that had only occurred a short time earlier.

Our renewed enthusiasm told us it was time to shake off the blockade, the embargo and the boycott and avenge our dead. Earlier in 1974, so many innocent Christian civilians, who had dared cross the sector on their way to Broumana, were kidnapped and executed! Besides, Tall el Zaatar, overhung the Christian sectors of Dekwaneh and Sin El Fil, and cut off East Beirut from its Northern suburbs. Therefore, we estimated that the battle we were called upon to carry out was the battle of liberation!

The military operations were conducted from a Monastery in Mar Moussa. The General Staff's plan was to move in from three axis and apply a pincer movement. With 23 boys of Section 104, we pounded our way to William Hawi's glass factory in Jisr Al Basha. Hawi, who was Chief of Staff of the Kataeb forces, ordered the United States to stop the shelling in order to save his business.

For 60 days, July and August, 1976, we shuttled between our posts on the fronts of Ayn Remaneh / Furn el Shebbak and Jisr Al Basha. Then, at the Limelight Bakery, at the round about of Mkalles, a mortar shell slammed our vehicle. Our Unit Chief Carlos Estephan was badly wounded and died on the way to the Sacred Heart in Hazmiyeh, the nearest hospital.

On the nights of August 11 and 12, 1976, the Palestinians surrendered. Tell Al Zaatar fell. Section 104 carried on with the fighting fulfilling our orders despite the heavy human loss in the ranks. The looting began under the vigilant supervision of our commanders.

William Hawi was killed. Rumors and stories circulated about Hawi's death. As a result, Bachir took over as Commander in Chief of the forces. Bashir ordered us to not to spare human life or property, move into the camp and clean it out from top to bottom. During our last mission, I and two of my companions were seriously wounded. My companions, Yussef Abou Abdu, received injury to his stomach when mortar shell shrapnel torn into it. Tony Karam's legs were blown off and shrapnel lodged in his stomach.

I spent two months in hospital in critical condition. The party paid me 3000 Lebanese pounds, then worth about thousand United States dollars. Due to the seriousness of my injuries, my parents decided that I had better continue my medical treatment in the United States. I was sent to my uncle's home in Miami, Florida. It was the Fall of 1976. While in Miami, I learned that the Syrian troops were deployed into the Christian Regions. Our victory in Tell Al Zaatar had been turned into a shameful defeat amidst a wave of popular anger, distress and distrust. I kept foaming and wondering why the hell all these

sacrifices? Could this be the end? I had seen so many horrors, battled on so many fronts, witnessed so many irregularities, been through hell with the Shabab, the boys, and back again. Could it be that the Christians were misled, betrayed and used as pawns in a deadly military chess game?

We were all anti-Syrian at heart. We all knew instinctually that the Syrian command since Independence, whatever its political color, had never recognized Lebanon as an independent state. While I was in the United States, I read in the newspapers that the Israeli leaders ordered a Kataeb envoy, dispatched there to inform them of the evolution of the situation, that they had no real objection to a Syrian deployment but should they set foot they would never ever quit fighting!

My parents and my friends called me in Miami, Florida from Beirut and cried in frustration. My family blamed the Syrians as well as the Christian leaders for the Syrian deployment. The Christian leaders had conditioned the people for an uprising and planted the seeds of hatred in their hearts and minds. They were now asking them to change their convictions by warmly welcoming the dreaded enemy into our homes. The dreaded enemy that would hang us by our thumbs and not yield the ground they stood upon. The walls of East Beirut spun around me with their tags "Know your enemy, the Syrian is your enemy", and the thundering Radio Voice of Lebanon editorialists resounded in my ears as they blamed all our miseries on the Syrians.

Deep inside, I knew trouble was brewing, that something was to be done and I had to be part of it. The struggle was not over. I prepared to go home. The Cedar, the Cross and the Cause haunted me. Nothing and no one could keep me away from my sacred duty.

From Israel to Damascus

CHAPTER 2: 1975 - Haifa, My First Trip to Israel

Despite the Israeli warnings and most Christian leaders' reluctance, the Syrian military deployment was carried out amidst a wave of reprobation and grudges. Everybody remembered Sheikh Pierre Gemayel's speech where he preferred dealing with a regular Syrian army than with the Palestinians armed groups.

I was catapulted into the war and the fighting because of the Cause. I was unwilling to lay down my arms but compelled to do so because our Chief Commander Sheikh Bashir Gemayel had been agreed to an Accord during an extraordinary meeting of the Lebanese Front in Sayedet El Bir Monastery. Our Chief Commander Gemayel was determined to play by the rules, secretly planning his attack to unleash his sword to smite the Syrians.

I later realized it was a costly blunder committed by our Christian leaders, despite their strong denial of the charges. Fortunately for us, Sheikh Bashir Gemayel had secured the approval of the Lebanese Front leaders to retain all the institutions founded by the Kataeb Party because of war conditions. However, our fever was brewing, and so was the storm. Nobody really believed that the war had ended and peace fully restored despite the actions of our leaders. There was too much at stake. Instead of peace, a tense quell set in. The boys had nothing to do, remaining idle, letting time go by, roaming in the streets, playing cards or backgammon and exchanging views on the evolution of situation and on incidents occurring here and there between the boys and the Syrian troops. To break the monotony, we schemed about ways to trigger trouble and acts of rebellion, unwanted under on-going attempts to promote peace.

It was difficult to keep the hot-headed, unruly and tough boys, the Shabab, under control. At first we kept a low profile. As time went by, fury seized us whenever we had to run through a Syrian checkpoint and put up with Syrian soldiers' affronts. We designed plans in our idleness. These plans had to be applied because we later learned that the Syrians were not our protectors as our leaders tried to convince us, but actual occupational forces. This realization resulted in real trouble!
As discord grew, grave problems between the Christian militia and the Syrians took a turn for the worse. Our military command, to avoid any armed confrontation with the Syrians, and with Israeli leader's approval, we were sent to Southern Lebanon to help clean the area from Palestinian terrorists. Our war was still against the Palestinians.

Boutros Khawand was one of Bashir Gemayel and Sheikh Pierre Gemayel's closest lieutenants. Khawand commanded the 200 trouble-shooters who were instructed to prepare to move out. On October 10, 1976, at the Arab Summit in Ryadh, promises were made to the Syrians and the Arabs by our leaders despite secret collaboration with

Israel. We were supposed to join another group commanded by Elie Hobeika, one of the Begin, whose assumed name then was Edward. Under prevailing conditions we had to move most cautiously and under the seal of silence. We were mustered in the Church at the sea front town of Bouar which is North of Beirut. We were then transported in dinghies in groups of 30 to an Israeli cargo ship anchored off the shore. Once aboard, we sailed to the Israeli port of Haifa.

In Haifa we were received by Tsahal officers who drove us to a military camp. For 15 days we received intensive military training. We were fully dressed in brand new uniforms and boots, armed, and equipped. We had no language problems because our instructors were all Yemeni, Tunisian, and even Lebanese from Wadi Abou Jmil, the Jewish neighborhood of the Capitol. This neighborhood had been occupied by the Shiite Moslems since 1976.

Once fit and ready, the Israeli command decided it was time for us to be entrusted with a mission in South Lebanon. The night before leaving, the Israeli troops threw a big party for us, and we were joined by the Lebanese Units already operating in the South. It was a host of men, most of whom were undisciplined and impulsive, who had gathered there to celebrate both an Israeli feast Day as well as our graduation. The Israelis asked us to «queue up». The others fell in line, but I could not leash my impulse, so I forced my way into the head of the line. Suddenly, somebody started yelling at me, "Stand in line like the rest of the boys." I flung myself at him yelling back, "I go where I please and I do what I want, okay?" I was held back by some of the boys who whispered to me, "have you gone off your rockers? Do you not know who he is? He is the Lebanese military commander of the Southern sector coordinating with Israel. He is Edward, did you not hear about him?"

I had made myself unintentionally conspicuous to the man who was to become my chief. For 20 years, I would be his blind and most loyal shadow and watchdog. He was "H.K.", Elie Hobeika, a military commander who I would follow without question.

The following day, we were detailed to South Lebanon. The boys of Section 104 of Furn El Shebbak were posted in TAYR HARFA . We had strict orders from the Israeli command not to go near the Moslem Shiite inhabitants and refrain from committing any executions whatsoever. Our objective was the hated Palestinian terrorists.

At first we played by the rules. After a short while, being idle most of the time and conditioned to look down upon the Shiite villagers whom we resented, we started to pick on them by shooting down their flocks of sheep and goats and stealing their hens and chickens at night. The inhabitants complained about our behavior and the Israelis concluded that we were never going to be disciplined soldiers. As a result, we were shipped back home. We had been away a few months.

We arrived in Beirut, high-minded and haughty. Our blood was up. We had earned a reputation and were known as the "Special Force." We loved to show off. The tense situation in the Christian regions was aggravating. The Syrian troops sought to humiliate

us and break us down openly to prove a point. While as high spirited as we were, we started ticking the Syrian troops on the sly, then defied them overtly at the checkpoints.

By the end of 1997, I was arrested at a Syrian checkpoint at Jisr Al Basha. This area had been a token of our past victory. I was carrying a weapon and as a result was taken to the headquarters in Horsh Tabet-Sin El Fil. There a Syrian officer, Ibrahim Howaiji and his soldiers set out to smite me. For three long days, I was beaten and tortured by the Syrians. Finally, my Commanding Chief Tony Mhanna of Section 104 rescued me and I returned to Furn El Shebbak.

From that moment on my hatred for the Syrians turned into a terrifying bloody-thirsty impulse. I was seized by an uncontrollable craving for vengeance which I could not uproot nor shelve. Unable to lay my eyes on them, to quench my thirst for vengeance, I decided to leave Lebanon for a while. A friend got me a contract with a Lebanese Christian who ran a huge lead work store in Saudi Arabia. That was my chance, I had to pick it before getting into big trouble.

Once away from home, the Cedars, the Cross and the Cause haunted me again. I worked all right, but very quickly. I could not help defending the Christian position and openly expressed my hatred for the Palestinians. No matter how strongly my boss warned me, I just could not keep my mouth shut. I knew I had nothing, yet everything to lose. My situation was getting terribly fragile and uneasy. Finally, after a big argument over the situation in Lebanon with a fellow worker who was a Palestinian, the Saudi police had to intervene. I was put on a plane back to Beirut. I had stayed in Saudi Arabia for four months and was just back where I had started.

While I was away, tension had been building between members of the Lebanese Front. President Soleiman Franjyeh was preparing to disassociate from the Christian Coalition. Conflicts were growing between him and Sheikh Pierre Gemayel and the Kataeb party. Franjyeh was looking for a reason to break away. Once again, another Christian leader, signaled the impending crucifixion of the Lebanese Christians in exchange for money and prestige. The elderly and supposedly wise man was not concerned about the consequences of his actions. He urged Kataeb party members to evacuate their stations and move their activities away from the North, specifically Zghorta-el Zawiya, the Franjiieh's fief. He wanted this because the «Marada» of his son, Tony could then alone be in control of the region. This move would ensure that the fortunes acquired by through illegal taxes levied against the people and economic institutions would be in his control. Most of the money had been taken from the two cement and roofing businesses on the coast of Shekka and from taxes levied on the hydrocarbon transported from the Port of Tripoli.

By early Spring, the Kataeb Party was losing men every day killed by the Franjieh's Marada. Local Kataeb party members were denied services in Zghorta bakeries, gasoline stations, and drugstores. Those who refused to respect Franjyeh supplied blacklist had their premises dynamited.

Following a two-day session in Zghorta, the Lebanese Front members came out empty handed, frustrated and dispirited. Tension continued to build between the Christians of the North and other regions until they reached the breaking point. That was when the Christian leaders resorted to assassination to settle their feuds. The Kataeb Party called for maximum restraint, but soon the restraint turned into bitter defeat. Pressures were exerted upon the leaders from the power base to stop the on-going internal bloodshed and avenge the innocent victims.

On June 8, 1978, a prominent Kataeb leader in Zghorta, Joud El Bayeh, was killed by six armed elements sent by Tony Franjieh. Sheikh Bashir decided to strike back to safeguard the credibility and unity of the Christian ranks.

On June 13, 1978, only six days later, a Kataeb commando led by Samir Geagea, a native of Bcharre, Zghorta's rival in ancestral feuds, and backed up by Elie Hobeika, launched a commando attack killing Tony Franjyeh, his family and his guards. The militiamen who were on the front line confirmed that Elie Hobeika was responsible for firing the deadly shots. Samir Geagea was seriously wounded and lost consciousness before getting into the house. Reports confirmed that the raid was carried out by a commando force of 500 members. Elie Hobeika had, in full conscience, overlapped the orders!
Later Samir Geagea claimed that the raid had only been a punitive operation to kidnap 12 members of the Franjieh clan who had killed Al Bayeh, seize Ehden and hold it until the Franjieh's evacuated Chekka. Chekka was the site of the cement and roofing factories. The Chekka rackets represented a lucrative source of revenue for whichever side controlled it. Joseph Abou Khalil reported that the raid's purpose was only to arrest Tony Franjyeh and bring him before the War Council where he would be detained until the Marada, Giants Brigade, stopped tracking the Kataeb Party members. Elie Hobeika actively perpetuated the mystery and his participation remained fuzzy.

The beginning of 1978 had been marked by a series of bloody incidents including the arrest of Sheikh Bashir Gemayel at a Syrian checkpoint in Ashrafieh. The Lebanese army clashed with the Syrian soldiers in Fayadiyeh. Syrian heavy artillery pounded the Christian sectors while the Lebanese Front and Forces supported the national army.

When I returned from Saudi Arabia, and joined my section 104 in Furn el Shebbak, I soon realized that the real action was at the War Council (Majliss Harbi) headed by Bashir Gemayel. On April 16, 1978, Gemayel, before the Ehden incident, sent an official message to the Lebanese government and the Syrian command, demanding the Cabinet clarify the prerogatives of the Syrians operating within the Arab deterrent Force. Bashir further stressed to the government that until his demand was met, the Unified Command of the Lebanese Forces would attend to the security of the citizens in the areas under its control.
I had to move fast to learn the details of the warlords, the center of decision-taking and war-making. It was Fuad Abou Nader and Poussy (Massoud) Ashkar, both comrades in arms, in south Lebanon who paved the way for me and introduced me to Elie Hobeika. Elie Hobeika was promoted chief of the Third Branch Division, in charge of special

military operations. Elie Hobeika became nicknamed H.K.. Poussy Ashkar was his assistant. My first assignment was to control the storehouses, and keep track of the Shabab who were sent on training sessions to Israel. My admiration and fondness for Elie Hobeika grew as I got to know him better backing him as we fought for the Cause together.

Barely a month after my new assignment, Elie Hobeika and G. Melco, a close assistant of Hobeika's, were taking Elias Moussa to the post in Adonis, mid-way between Beirut and Junieh, for questioning. Elias Moussa was charged with having developed secret contacts with the Palestinians. While in route to Adonis, Hobeika was arrested at a Lebanese army checkpoint and flown by helicopter to an unknown destination. Hobeika's boys flared into a towering rage and immediately took to the streets, arms in hand. Hobeika was my direct chief, and I was at a loss. I could not and would not take any prerogative without him. So I decided to go home and lock myself in and wait.

While I was cooped up in utter dejection, eating my heart out, some of the boys reported to me that a Lebanese army helicopter carrying Saudi Ambassador Ail El Shaer and heading to West Beirut had flown over Junieh. The helicopter had been heavily shot and forced to land in a lettuce field right under Le Christ Roi area. Ambassador Ail El Shaer, safe but scared, was driven to Maroun Machaalani. Nazo and their boys believed the helicopter was transporting their Military Chief Elie Hobeika and ordered the attack to force a landing and liberate their Chief.

When Machaalani discovered his mistake, he blew up the empty battered helicopter in despair. Mashaalani sustained severe burns as a result and spend time at the Hotel Dieu Hospital. Nazo suffered scared hands. He received medical treatment and was sent home to recovery.

Despite their attempts, Elie Hobeika, was not released. Instead, H.K. and Butros Khawand, were charged with the assassination of a Lebanese army commando officer Kozhaya Chamoun. Chamoun was a rough and tough giant commanding the unit in charge of Fuad Butros, the foreign Minister's residence in Ashrafieh. Chamoun's corpse was found near the water reservoir in Karantina. The original order to kidnap Chamoun came from Bashir Gemayel and Poussy Ashkar. They were seized by a towering rage and resentment to avenge the cold-blooded murder of another army officer Captain Samir El Ashkar, shot down in his home town of Beit Shabab, and knocked off in the ambulance carrying him to hospital. I was told that the combatants had marched in force to Fuad Boutros' residence and clashed with the Lebanese army commando Unit (Al Mukafaha) posted there. Still Elie Hobeika was not released.

Only mounting pressures on the Lebanese Army finally led to the unconditional liberation of Elie Hobeika. After his release, Hobeika invited the boys to celebrate in Broumana. We ate, drank and saw the video film of Israeli Antebe Raid programmed operations to liberate a high-jacked Israeli Al Aal plane. I remember we were so excited that we believed we were actually the Israeli commando force operating the raid. I felt so close to H.K then, that I pledged to give him my life.

Elie Hobeika was the hero and the bold and daring knight I had to follow and serve. He felt the need for my skills. From then on, I became his shadow and his «dog». I slowly began to lose my identity; acting, reacting, and thinking one with him to stay alive. I was even known as "Cobra-H.K." I honestly and truly believed then that the future of Lebanon and its Christian People was in H.K.'s hands. He was the brain, I was the muscle. I had to protect and preserve him by carrying out his orders on public and private levels. His name, Elie Hobeika, was no longer uttered. He was H.K. A set of initials that terrified and struck awe into the people of the eastern regions.

H.K. was rising quickly in power. He was on the military and Intelligence level. Bashir was his supreme authority. H.K. controlled the ground. As chief of the Third Division, he organized it into three Rapid Intervention Commando Units of 50 highly trained units. One unit was under the command of Maroun Mashaalani which was in charge of special operations. Its symbol is the skull. The second unit was commanded by Joseph El Haji known as Abou Halka. The unit was comprised of boys from Zahleh. Their mission was to deal with the Bekaa area. The third unit was under the command of George Melco, composed mostly of the Shabab from Hay el Syrian. This unit was the fiercest of all assigned to deal with Ashrafieh, Badaro and Ayn Remaneh.

I never showed any interest in whatever was brewing because psychologically I had conditioned myself to hear without listening and forget instantly whatever was not for me to deal with. I blindly followed H.K.'s orders.

As H.K.'s shadow, I knew H.K. was deeply annoyed that he had not yet been able to be promoted to Chief of Intelligence and Police (Jihaz El Amn) commonly known as the Second Bureau. H.K. intensely felt he rightly deserved the position. It was run by Gaby Toutounji, Bachir Gemayel's brother-in-law. Gaby Toutonunji was busy dealing with a wave of boobie-trapped cars sent by the Palestinians to massacre the Christians in the eastern regions. Innocent victims were being killed and panic set in. Elie Hobeika took advance of this panic to gain power. He sought influence from the leaders.
Fuad Abou Nader, Tony Kessrouani and Fadi Frem, all former members of the «Bejin», the intellectuals, members of Bashir's inner circle, pressed for H.K.'s appointment as he was a full time militiaman. They justified this appointment because H.K. was more experienced based on his Israeli military and intelligence training and because he was more gutsy, ruthless and shrewd. Hobeika for his part came to grips with Toutounji, both wasting precious time over internal conflicts. Bashir teamed up with his brother-in-law and H.K. was sent home. Bomb cars swarmed into the Christian sectors killing more people everyday. In the end, Bashir not only reinstated H.K. in his military position, but promoted him to Chief of Security and Intelligence (Jihaz Al Amn). H.K's cruelty, sagacity and treachery had gained him momentum and his growing power was feared.

While the internal power games were being played, the War Council decided that it was necessary to contain inter-Christian flare-ups between the Kataeb Forces and the Noumour el Ahrar , Tiger Forces. The forces were accused of resorting to skullduggery, running illegal gambling dens, smuggling drugs, specially hash, out of the five ports they controlled, and firing on the Palestinians.

The year 1979 was marked by boobie trapped cars and new and deadly internal Christian conflicts. On the ground, clashes were erupting daily between the Kataeb and the Noumour el Ahrar , Tigers Forces, leaving many dead and wounded. The clashes swayed from Ayn Remaneh, Furn El Shebbak to Safra and Bouar in the Kessrouan. Bitter resentment swiftly seized the population. The big explosion was about to take place. The course had been set, the only question that remained was when?

On May 6, 1980, during an extraordinary meeting of the Commanding War Council officers, Sheikh Bashir Gemayel announced: "There is a crucial problem I want to discuss with you. A historical issue relative to our Cause. The problem between the Kataeb and the Ahrar. I am the only one who can deal with it. I'll put forward a proposition and I want your opinion."

While Sheikh Bashir Gemayel spoke those words, resentments continued to grow as the three Christian political currents were taking shape. The Kataeb were opening bridges with Syria, Chamoun aligned with the Franjieh, and the Lebanese Forces adamantly continued to express their anti-Syrian convictions. Inter-Christian dissension was now expressed in the open. The big explosion was inevitable. The leaders, the people had forgotten the unity, the Christian principles and values, the Cause. The war game had the upper hand. Treason was part of the game on every possible level and in every single phase of the war!

Late summer of 1979, as Kataeb Party leaders were ordered to hand over war prisoners detained in the Syrian jailhouse of Mazze since 1978, the Syrian artillery pounded the northern towns of Niha, Deyr Bella and Douma in collusion with the Franjiehs' Marada. The minute the clashes allayed, violence deliberately exploded between the Kataeb and the Tigers in the Southern Matn area. The Tigers kidnapped 10 Kataebs in Houmal, who in turn attacked the Chamoun's Section in Kfarshima/Betshay and occupied it. To top it all, after one Kataeb was killed in Wadi Shahrour. The Lebanese army intervened in favor of the Tigers in Houmal. The outcome was heavy. Nine Kataeb were killed and the Section besieged!
There was only one alternative: Surgery. The Safra or "Red Light" operation had been set up by Elias El Zayek and Fuad Abou Nader and carried out on D-Day by Elie Hobeika.

On Monday July 7, 1980, the Lebanese Forces simultaneously attacked the Tigers' barracks, National Liberal Party ports, offices and other strong points. About 1200 militiamen among the toughest were assembled in Jeita Grotto in the Kessrouan for the assault.

Bashir and Hobeika had originally planned the attack at first light. Mindful of the Ehden mess, they sacrificed the element of surprise and waited until 10:30 a.m. when Tiger militia commander Dany Chamoun had left his seaside home in Safra-Marine to go to work on a resort project in Fakra in the mountain. The fighting continued through the day and most of the night A number of innocent civilians were killed. We fired indiscriminately, according to instructions, specially at the seaside marina and hotel complexes where the Tigers had fallen back.

It was at Rabieh Marine that our hatred for those who stood in our way, betrayed us, and killed our friends, spurt out. We were zombies, unaware that the people we were slaughtering were Christians! Media accounts reported that the soldiers were drugged to justify why such an event would have been carried out. We were simply brain-washed and manipulated. Elie Hobeika's voice dictated strict orders throughout the assault. I was hypnotized. I was doing what I was told, throwing people out of upper-story windows. Shooting others in the swimming pool. It was kill or die, and we had no time for reflection or moods.

Elie Hobeika personally steered the operation. Maroun Mashaalani headed the convoy to Tabarja and Safra, in a civilian car, came under heavy machine gun fire from the Kataeb guys who mistook them for Tiger infiltrators. The operation ended in a pool of blood. Tracy Dany Chamoun fled the North to seek protection from the Syrian ally, Soleiman Franjieh. He vowed vengeance and traveled abroad. H.K would do the same six years later. Tracy Dany Chamoun was safely conducted to Soleiman Franjieh by Pierre Rizk, a prominent member of Hobeika's clan. Contrary to what was claimed later, she was treated with respect and consideration.

After the Safra assault, Bashir became King of the Christian sectors and Hobeika sky rocketed to the highest military position. H.K. positioned and asserted himself and inspired and manipulated his power which he cleverly cultivated. His lieutenants in «Jihaz Al Amn», the most important section of the War Council, were Michel Zouein in charge of Operations, Emile Eid in charge of Investigations, Tony Aramane in charge of the Borders and Crossways, Elias Chartouni in charge of Drugs and Crimes, and Gaby Boustany in charge of inquiries and investigations.

Assaad Shaftary whose office was in Ashrafieh/Sioufi was First Lieutenant and took orders directly from H.K. Second in command were the Security officers: Maroun Mashaalani, George Melco and Joseph Hajj (Abou Halka). For my part, I was his bodyguard, his "homme de confiance" and "homme de main", his henchman and I felt like a King. I had the world at my feet, and the future in my arms! What more could I want?

At that time, I did not give a damn about politics and what went on in meetings. If I ever heard something I made it a point to wipe it out because, I could not take the risk of my tongue slipping and jeopardizing my Chief's action and the Christian Cause. Whatever was discussed was too big for me to comprehend or discuss. However, try as I might every single moment, event or discussion had been carefully stored in my mind.

Today I remember the first time President Camille Chamoun came to attend the Lebanese Forces War Council meeting about two months after the Safra Operation. I heard them say that Bashir Gemayel paid as much as One million United States dollars to President Chamoun and allowed him to take his old cut of the profits from the main port of Dbayeh,. That was how he won him over.

Nevertheless, the high-handed power struggle between Chamoun and the Tiger militia continued to upset the Christian community. Things settled down for a while and the Christians accepted to be represented by a single man, Bashir and a single Organization, the Lebanese Forces.

The events of July 7, 1980, and the Israeli Operation, less than two years later were all part of a screenplay spelled liberation and triumph and which reestablished the Maronite ascendancy.

On August 3, 1980, President Camille Chamoun asked the Lebanese army to protect the Sections of the NLP in the Southern suburbs of Hadath and Ayn Remaneh, while reaffirming that he was President of an exclusive political party.

On October 31, 1980, Bashir decided to brush aside the Units of the army. Violent fighting broke out. An accord was reached and the army would be deployed along the demarcation lines. Internal security in "Liberated Lebanon" was to be maintained by the Lebanese Forces alone. Two months later the Zahleh battle broke out.

Meanwhile, Bashir, his cause and his lieutenants, was being strengthened by the Israelis. I remember dinners were devoted to thanking his lieutenants for their good work and keeping their spirits up. They had everything of which they could dreamed.

From Israel to Damascus

CHAPTER 3: 1975 - The Safra Operation and the Battle of Zahle

The years 1978 and 1980 where critical turning points in Lebanon's war history. The two highlights were the "100-Day War" and the Battle of Zahleh. During the 100-Day War, the Safra operation against the Tigers had not yet taken place. The Christians were united, and the Syrians were unchained. Sheikh Bashir Gemayel was arrested by the Syrian troops in Ashrafieh where he was dragged to their command in Rizk Tower. Following his arrest, the Unified Command of the Lebanese Forces met and strongly condemned what was called the «Syrian aggression against Sheikh Bashir, The Leader». On the evening of July 1, 1978, Syrian guns opened up and crushed Ayn Remaneh, Jdeideh, Furn El Shebbak, Tahwita, Hazmieh Road, claiming numerous innocent victims.

On July 2, 1978, East Beirut was ablaze. Before nightfall, there were more than 60 civilians killed and over 300 wounded. The Christian Command issued a statement that all Syrian infiltration attempts were foiled, that we must remain confident in our capacity, and above all, resist and be true to our sacred cause. Resist! We had no alternative, we were boosted and all worked up. We could fight against the World if necessary.

The Syrian attack occurred in the strained relations between Syria and the Lebanese Fron. The one exception was President Soleiman Franjieh who had chosen the Syrian camp where it was extremely tense. Syria was the enemy. The pressure was on President Elias Sarkis against impossible conditions to hammer the Christians. Hafez Assad was pressing for an official cover for his army to be deployed under the screen of the so-called "Arab Deterrent Forces." The cover was for everywhere on the territory without exception and without impediment. Even the Amid Raymond Edde, through his straight forward manner, declared that the Syrians were using the Ehden massacre to annihilate the Kataeb party in order to occupy Lebanon down to the Litani river. That occupation would definitely lead to the partition of Lebanon.

By July 6, 1978, Beirut was burning. President Sarkis decided to resign. Every Lebanese Christian was flabbergasted. The resignation was an innovation in Lebanon's political history, a somersault. The Kataeb Party's Radio Voice of Lebanon moved by sea to the heart of the Kessrouan in Al Loueizeh Monastery to keep on broadcasting. Sheikh Bashir inaugurated his own Radio Station, Radio Free Lebanon, in a far-off mountain spot named Azra with Sejaan Azzi as director, to keep at a distance with the Kataeb.

President Camille Chamoun maintained the fire outside, and down deep inside of everyone of us ready to fight to the last man after President Chamoun announced that

Syria was determined to do away with all the Christians. Later in one of President Chamoun's addresses to the Christian combatants he stated: "Syria has now launched against you the war of extermination. I am pressing you today to join forces and struggle for freedom and dignity. As to Sheikh Pierre Gemayel, he has never been harder. Syria is trying to make you kneel down, but we'll never kneel."

President Sarkis, under United States pressure, withdrew his resignation to the great displeasure of the Syrians. The morale of the resisting Christian combatant's and the people had never been higher. Syrian pressure was maintained for hundreds of days. Heavy random shelling resulted in the eastern regions being cut off becoming besieged sectors. Sniping, in short terror was at its zenith.

Syrian soldiers even managed to break through our Ashrafieh lines and reached Berty's Drugstore. That is where Michel Berty, a hero we all remember and honor, was killed, fighting for liberty to his last breath. For the first time, the "Boys" managed to kick off the Syrian troops, kill most of the assailants and recover every lost position previously taken. Fierce fighting also broke out between soldiers at the Al Batone building, the Al Murr tower and the Saifi front. Again the Syrians lost many of their men and retreated.

The Syrians also destroyed the Karantina Operations Room and Elie Hobeika decided we should move to the Electricity Board premises. We were short of ammunitions and the people who were trapped, short of food. That is when Mony Arab gave us permission to break open all supermarkets and food stores. I led the mission in an armored car and the boys followed in the Yellow Electricity Board jeeps and vans. We loaded the vehicles with the looted stuff and along the way distributed the food to the starving soldiers. That is when I saw that the S.K.S barracks had been pulled down to the ground.

Shortly after President Chamoun's stirring and unequivocal message, one of the Christian Patriarchy, President Soleiman Franjieh went to Damascus and laid the Christians low by announcing that if it were not for Syria, Lebanon would have been lost!

President Franjieh thus triggered the Syrian war against the isolated Christians of the North, and Mount Lebanon. Mount Lebanon was strong with the unconditional support of a Christian Patriarch who betrayed his own community and decided to get even with the rest of the Christians indiscriminately and do away with all Christians and Lebanon.

It was not until November, 1978, that the world woke up to the seriousness of the situation. The United Nations Security Council finally imposed a cease fire between the Lebanese Forces and the Syrian Army. When the cease fire went into effect this time, the Lebanese realized the ferocity of the Syrians who, unable to wipe us out, handwiped out our city and all of its public services. The strongest and most lethal blizzard could not have done what the Syrians had done in a hundred days of blind and hateful bombing.

Although calm returned, and the Saudi troops replaced the Syrians, it was portent of the tragedy of Zahleh. It was between the 100-Day War and the Battle of Zahlei that Sheikh

Bashir Gemayel, strong with his new political victory, and having «kicked out» the Syrians, replaced in Eastern regions by Saudi soldiers, decided to "unify the gun."

The Tigers were annihilated and Dany Chamoun, their chief, turned to Damascus, as if under some sort of spell called Syria. Syria that picks up the blacksheep within the Christian ranks, puts them to the test and then uses them against their kin and next of kin. The Christian leaders always fall into the trap to get their own selfish revenge, uncaring about the consequences on the Christian people at large.

After the "Red Light operation", Dany Chamoun and his men, Elias Hanash, Elie Charbel, and Al Zaghloul moved over to West Beirut where they struck an alliance with the Syrian Command and the Palestinians. They coordinated with Fath Security and the Delegates Bureau. Their objective was to reestablish their good name and make their way back into some Christian areas which they considered out of reach of the Kataeb Party and the Lebanese Forces. They set up their command in Shtaura Jdita in the Bekaa, tearing off another territory from the basic Christian command which was Franjieh in the North, Chamoun in the Bekaa.

After being the first, truest and most convincing Israeli ally, Dany Chamoun was coldly turning Syrian and Palestinian, throwing himself into the arms of Israel's sworn enemies. The new pro-Syrian Christian command included among others, Khalil Hrawi, Joseph Abou Yunes, Michel Felfleh, and other leading citizens such as Elias Hrawi, and Joseph Skaff who placed their business with the Syrians above any other consideration.

The military side was supervised by Ahmad Ismail, Chief of the Palestinian Security and Delegates Bureau. Their obsession of striking and gaining control of the Christian Bekaa town of Zahleh, was becoming a reality. Militarily weak, and cut off from the Christian fiefdom (East Beirut, Kessrouan, Northern Matn and Byblos), Zahleh was almost handed over to them on a golden plate.

To shake the foundation of the Kataeb Party, the Syrians, Palestinians and their newly acquired Christian ally, Dany Chamoun planned and assassinated the Kataeb party military commissioner Fawzi Khazzika on the road to Taanayel. The terrorist plan unrolled. A new commissioner was appointed. George Saadeh whom Joseph Hajj, Abu Halka, met in Beirut and warned him against a planned attempt on his life. He would not listen. A week later he was shot down. The incident was ominous and fraught with consequences.

The atmosphere was overcast. The Christians' aversion for foreign armed elements moving freely in the city under the cover of a local Christian Party, Dany Chamoun's party grew. Bashir Gemayel and the Kataeb Party could not take it lying down. Not content with just a display of force, Hanash and his men raided the houses of Kataeb Party members or allies in the city. The outburst of inter Christian clashes was imminent.

It happened in 1980. The Tigers were supported by the Palestinians and their leftist Lebanese allies. Although the Christians had numerous casualties, the Tigers were

enilated. In their rage and incited by the Syrians, the Palestinians opened up heavy artillery fire on all the sectors of Zahleh whether residential or military. Despite their efforts, the battle was lost. The Tigers were disarmed, the Kataeb Party and Lebanese Forces regained control of the 150,000 Christian that inhabited the City of Zahleh.

The Syrians would not admit their indirect defeat. They claimed the Bekaa was theirs just as the Israelis had claimed the South. The big storm was brewing.

On December 19, 1980, all out fighting exploded in Zahleh between the Syrian troops and the Lebanese Forces. The Lebanese Forces were supported by the Zahleh inhabitants. The Syrians had prepared for such an outbreak by bringing in reinforcements by helicopters and preparing for continued fighting. They had to spark the ignition. They sent a military truck with five Syrian soldiers on a patrol mission along the Boulevard to the Zahleh square. This scheme strangely resembled the Ayn Remaneh event on April 13, 1975. The five Syrian soliders and the Unit Commander Major Idriss were attacked and killed. Two Syrian helicopters were hit. Fighting erupted via Palestinian and leftist allies. Following fierce fighting, a cease fire was soon imposed, but the hatred remained and it was building.

The Syrian scheme was working. They had begun the fighting which allowed the military leaders to launch a general assault on the city four months later. On April 2, 1980, Zahleh was shut in, heavily besieged and massively bombed. The attack was later to become known as "The Bloody Day" or "Doomsday." The attack was the first day the Christians were exulted. The Syrians, in trying to seize the hills above the mountain-flanked city, lost three armored vehicles and more than 20 soldiers.
The Syrians retaliated with an artillery barrage in East Beirut with their usual brutality that caught residents by surprise, inflicted heavy casualties, and emptied the Christian part of the capital for the next few months.

The Lebanese Front and Lebanese Forces sent reinforcements through a strategically located steep mountain road. The road was under construction by the Lebanese Forces to transverse the Lebanon mountain range linking the Christian heartland to Zahleh.

By then, sharp differences had erupted within the Christian camp in Zahleh. There was real strains and stresses among the junior warlords. Fuad Abou Nader and Boutros Khawand were dispatched to settle matters. Bashir sent the commander of the Lebanese Forces armored battalion, Joseph Elias, a tough guy from Zahleh. He failed in his mission to reconcile the Lebanese forces commanders and was replaced by Jo Eddeh.

However, the combatants were not only at odds, but unprepared for a big showdown. Bashir was determined to go on whatever the cost, strong with Israeli logistic support, and internal election situation. Lebanese Forces troops gathered in Ouyoun El Simman and moved over to Zahleh. Weather conditions were lousy and heavy snow covered the mountain peaks where the boys were expected to cross. The inhabitants of Zaleh were utterly demoralized. Fierce battles broke out resulting in numerous casualties. Then Samir Geagea arrived. He had been preceded by Elias Zayek assisted by a number of

Bekaai combatants such as Tito and Albert. When the Doctor showed up, the Lebanese Forces command headquarters had been wrecked. The officers were in complete disarray and disagreed on many points. Geagea decided to immediately return to Beirut. Geagea's report stated that the City of Zaleh was a total military lost. Relations between the leadership of the Lebanese Forces junior warlords was desperate. Joseph el Hage alias Abou Halka led him to Wadi Al Arayesh in the middle of the night with about 40 young men who decided to give up, disgusted by the prevailing conditions.

The next 10 days were more than hell. Fighting was in full swing. The Syrians, by their heavy-handed dealings with the Christians, were moved by two objectives: first, to break down the Christian Lebanese forces and the Christians; and, second, to gain command of the strategic Beirut-Damascus Road.

The Christian chieftains appealed to the world for assistance. The statements made by United States State Secretary Haig spoke unequivocally of "the Syrian army of occupation brutality." Bashir sought to provoke an international crisis to force the Syrians out. All Christian media continued to appeal to the world to rescue the beleaguered Christians facing genocide. The Syrians continued to wantonly kill men women and children, and the world began to respond. Zahleh had become the Symbol of Christian resistance and, in fact, sacrificed itself for all the Christians of Lebanon.

The outcome of this battle would determine the future of all the Lebanese Christians. On April 28, 1981, Israeli airforce planes, American built F-15s and F-16s shot down two Syrian army helicopters over the Bekaa valley north of the Beirut-Damascus road. The next day, Hafez Assad of Syria moved in. His army installed three radar fit batteries of Soviet-made ground-to-air missiles alongside the Beirut Damascus road. Begin warmed the Syrians to remove the missiles or Israeli fighter bombers would do the job. Israel Hgad finally moved in as the Christians had hoped and prayed for.
We were actually exulting. Lebanon was now at the very center of an international crisis. Philip Habib, a man of Lebanese extraction, was dispatched by the Reagan administration to untangle the mess. By then, the United States was siding up with Bashir Gemayel and embraced him formally. He was now the strongest single force in Lebanon and declared after his first tete a tete with Habib that the new American understanding of the Christian Cause constituted the greatest victory of the struggle.

The siege of Zahleh was lifted on June 30, 1981, and our men were bussed out of the Bekaa, decorated and feted in a ceremony and the Lebanese Forces Headquarters and covered by local and foreign media. A stupendous political victory was won.

A short while later, the Saudis were pressed by the Reagan Administration to buy off the belligerents. They paid Syria millions of United States dollars according to confirmed rumors, and Sheikh Bashir was invited on a 24-hour trip to Ryadh where he was told that he had to acquiesce to the Syrian formal demands in writing to sever all ties with Israel. Which he did. The Christian warlord was consecrated. The way was wide open for him to leap to the top job in Lebanon.

From Israel to Damascus

CHAPTER 4: 1981 - Hobeika Banks on Two Horses, Israel and Syria

By January, 1982, Bashir Gemayel was the undisputed and unique chief of the Christian fiefdom. His myth-making capacity had allowed him to sweep away the Independence Generation and every single person with enough ambition to stand in his way. Not only the Maronites, but the Christians at large were represented by one strong man, a "monster" whose errors (and they were countless) were overlooked and even used to serve his goals. He stood for liberation, triumph, and reestablished Christian, the Maronite supremacy. His policy of "resistance" was later used and misused by his two lieutenants, namely Elie Hobeika and Samir Geagea, each of whom betrayed the Christian power base and slaughtered Christians to serve their own objective. Most Christian who followed were them lured into believing it was necessary in the practically besieged Christian ghetto as the liberated regions were called.

Bashir was the revolutionary idol every single person trusted or dared not distrust. He knew the data, he was qualified to deal with them. He had isolated his closest assistants, friends and relatives including his brother Amin. His allies, the Israelis who had blown hot and cold so often, remained his only salvation board especially since they had threatened to invade Lebanon and guarantee his political future in the very top job: President of the Republic. Nobody, however, can deny the Israeli backing in Bashir's ascension.

At one time, Bashir was strong with the popular support and military control. He even thought he was powerful enough to apply his tactics with the Israelis. He triggered a competition between his presidential ambitions and his allies plans and views. He created frictions between the Israelis and their American allies.

Strong with Israeli support, Sheikh Bashir officially declared that the Syrian forces must first leave Beirut, then all of Lebanon, before the start of the summer election campaign. After his meeting with Mr. Menacham Begin in Nahariya, a meeting that looked more like a breaking off, he asked Elie Hobeika to make overtures with the Syrians.

That was when Elie Hobeika, jumped at the chance and grabbed his luck to put his personal schemes into effect. In 1981, after the war in Zahleh, H.K had already began to bank on two horses. Through the pro-Syrian Lebanese Army General and Commander of

the Arab deterrent forces, Sami Khatib, he managed to go to Damascus and hold a meeting with Syrian President's brother Rifaat el Assad.

The first time we set foot in the Syrian capital, H.K. whispered to me: "Did you ever dream of carrying your arm on your hip and standing on the soil of the Syrian Capital? Now you carry your gun on you and your machine gun in the car conspicuously and you are in the heart of Damascus, on an official visit. How does it feel?"

In fact, I thought I was dreaming. All along I said to myself, he is my chief, he knows best. It was the right thing to do. I was not aware that he was only bargaining with the lives and welfare of the Christian community. When he called on Rifaat El Assad at his luxurious office, it was only a few paces from Abdul Halim Khaddam's, but we did not get to meet him. The meeting lasted for more than two hours after which we drove back to Lebanon under the cloak of night.

I sensed his deep satisfaction then. He was playing on his own, and I felt proud even though somewhat uneasy. In the back of my mind, I was wondering what he was cooking with our «enemy» and kept saying to myself "he knows best.". Vain, glory, submission and allegiance finally washed away doubt, and this nagging feeling of remorse.

I kept thinking "whatever he was hatching with our enemy must be for the best interests of the Christians because my boss is the shrewdest and mightiest." A month later, H.K. told me secretly that we were going on a week long trip to France. As usual, he gave me no details. I had to be ready for departure at any minute. Strange enough in the particular conflict context, we left Beirut from the international airport in the western part of the capital, aboard a MEA plane, the only company that still used it.

I remember driving to Hadath/Laylaki crosspoint where a Lebanese military Range Rover, sent especially by Johnny Abdo, then Chief of Army Intelligence which took us to the airport and the Boeing safely. As the plane took off and he was relaxed, content and comfortable in the air, in his business class seat, he asked me to fetch his mistress of the moment named Lola, who was traveling with us but in economy class, and remain in her seat all through the trip until landing time.

We spent a week in Paris at the Concorde Lafayette Hotel moving around in taxi. While he was in the company of Rifaat and Jamil el Assad, I played ball! I did not stop for a minute to ask what they were doing or why, but deep down I felt confused, somewhat off color. Especially that evening when Rifaat el Assad invited him to dinner at the Raspoutine Nightclub in the Champs Elysdes. There were five persons including myself. The atmosphere was friendly, relaxed and overcast with complicity. The men chatted, and I attended, with great pleasure, to Lola. The following day we flew back to Beirut.

Barely two months after the political spree in Paris, I escorted my chief to Damascus twice for meetings with the Lebanese Christians' public enemy number one "Mr Abdul Halim Khaddam". It was mid 1982, when Sheikh Bashir Gemayel was well into his

presidential "campaign". I was closer than ever to the Israeli military and political forces. Intuitively, I kept drawing a parallel between the opposite poles: Israel and Syria.

All of the Israeli top Intelligence Officers trusted me and respected me, knowing I was their Man, H.K's watchdog. Mr Ariel Sharon in all his might, used to call me by my war name, "Send me Cobra. I do not need my personnel chauffeur, I want Cobra to drive me". I alone was allowed to drive the Israeli officials back and forth from their secret meetings with Bashir and Hobeika from their headquarters in Zouk in the Kessrouan, to Naccache in a villa in the Matn.

With the Syrians, I always sensed we were somehow crawling, swimming in murky water, cornered and standing at bay. Swiftly and surely, I always blurred and buried the events I saw and my personal feelings and discussions about them. I knew by instinct that it was imperative, under such circumstances, to turn amnesiac besides being unloquacious by temper.
We were so far from 1976 and 1978, and all the impetuosity and spontaneity that steered the "Shababs". We were turning "Mukhabarat", that is to say, Arab Intelligence with its mean, shifty and crooked ways, kissing the hand they could not bite.
The Christian power base was adamantly anti-Syrian. The eagerly anticipated and much whispered Israeli salvation invasion was their last hope to get rid of both Palestinians and Syrians. Who would want more? The choice was simple between a strong, powerful, and determined ally, to whom we owed so much already, and a sneaky, underhanded, cruel and greedy potential protector ready to swallow us.

Apparently, the Christian warlords were stabbing everybody in the back, people and friends alike, tearing down the dream of a Christian-run Lebanon. While the "Peace in Galilee" Operation was well underway, and the Israeli war machine was sweeping the north, and the Christian promise regarding military participation or at least rear-facility interference, was stalled.
At dawn on June 6, 1982, the operation was in gear, Defense Minister General Sharon and Chief of Staff General Eytan, had notified Bashir Gemayel and H.K. that they would not progressing through the Beirut-Damascus Highway. The purpose was to evict Arafat and the PLO and help him set up a new Lebanese Republic rid of all Palestinian armed presence. It was now his move. He did not budge.

As it was proved later, the Christians have never honored their word. They stood and watched the sharing of the fruits of their efforts. It was only normal for the Israeli command to be resentful. Unable to back out or hold up, the Israeli army proceeded deep into their lands penetrating the outskirts of Beirut. It had dramatic consequences on Israel, the United States. United States State Secretary Alexander Haig was forced to resign on June 25, 1982. It had just as far reaching an effect on General Ariel Sharon. They paid the price of the Christian weathercock policy. Tension set in between Israel and the Reagan administration, and Bashir Gemayel was President for only 23 days.

The triumphant Christian chieftains were convinced they had played the Americans against the Israelis, and the Israelis against the Syrians. They ignored how dangerous this

game was for them, for their loyal combatants and for the Christian population. They lived in the euphoria of their very personal victories, mindless of their credibility.

From Israel to Damascus

CHAPTER 5: The Four Iranian diplomats

It was during the siege of West Beirut that Bashir Gemayel decided to open a hatch to West Beirut for those persons who wanted to flee to Tripoli (North Lebanon) or the Bekaa Valley. That was when the Iranian diplomats were kidnapped and slaughtered, together with 230 Lebanese Shiite Moslem. It was 15 years ago when the crime was committed. Two impenitent gamblers, Hobeika and Geagea, resorted to their usual roundabout ways, and were now accusing Israel of detaining them, and of seeking to exchange them for the Israeli pilot Ron Arad reportedly held in an Iranian jail.

Whatever the transgressions, and evasiveness, four Iranians were dead and buried under Eucalyptus trees cheek-by-jowl within the three-story War Council building housing Intelligence and Security Headquarters.

Aboard the diplomatic car, as we later came to learn who were the dead, were the Iranian charge d'affaires, Mohsen Moussawi, two diplomats, Ahmad Kussliane and Kazem Anuan and the chauffeur, Taki Rastakar.

Around noon the convoy set out crossing the first checkpoint between the two sectors of the capital. One hour later, they reached the "Barbara" checkpoint, the border passage between the Christian sector and the North, bolted by Samir Geagea, Commander of the Lebanese Forces of the North and his iron disciplined military men. The convoy was stopped, identities checked and the four men arrested. The Internal security forces were ordered to leave after a sharp altercation.

A few hours after the Iranians had been taken into custody, Johnny Abdo contacted Bashir Gemayel from the Army command in Yarze and informed him that the Iranian diplomats had not reached their destination. Their contact in Tripoli was anxious. No one knew their whereabouts since their stopover at the Lebanese Forces Barbara checkpoint. All Abdo offered to concerned advisors was a vague answer which was the standard information given in such cases.

H.K. had the upper hand on every big or small operations in the eastern regions. He was deputized by Bashir who was now busy with politics. H.K. was now the Chief of Intelligence and Security, the most important Division of the Lebanese Forces. H.K. used his position to detain the four Iranians. Once in custody, Geagea contacted H.K. at

the Karantina Headquarters and asked him what he should do with them. The answer was short, "Send them over."

Captain Raji Abdo was the liaison officer between Samir and H.K. Captain Abdo was also the Chief of Intelligence and Security in the North and the Lebanese Forces officer who held the four Iranians up, questioned them and then personally escorted them, on orders from Samir Geagea, to Central Intelligence Headquarters at the Karantina (Mabna Al Amn), lying behind the Sleep Comfort Factory and Show Room.

There, Captain Abdo handed over the four arrested Iranians to H.K. Over coffee, they discussed developments and internal affairs. Once Captain Abdo's mission had been accomplished, I walked him to his car and he drove back to his post at the Barbara Junction.

In 1986, George Sabbagh, also known as Abou Tony, and later as Abou Ayman in Zahleh took over. Abou Tony was a tough, cruel and ruthless fellow in charge of prisoners. He was the terrifying warden. He interrogated them and applied his most sophisticated torture techniques on them. George Yunes, alias Al Abouna, was the caterer and in his spare time participated in the torture sessions. Al Amn jailhouse, barely 200 meters from the Amn Headquarters, held the Shia Moslems and Iranian prisoners who all died under torture. During the Israeli invasion of 1982, some 200 Shiites were buried in ditches dug close to the Amn building. They were buried at the foot of eucalyptus trees and covered with limestone to speed up the decomposition of the cadavers and to eliminate nauseating smells.

After this incident, Stevie Nakkour, a very close friend of mine who was in charge of logistics dealing with building and construction, came up to me and told me in confidence that Paul Ariss pressed him to clean out all the ditches because the Iranians were buried there and it could trigger big trouble. The remains had to be dug up, carried and re-buried in the area of Wadi Al Jamajem (Valley of Skulls) on the road to Mazraat-Kfarzebiane and in the area of Maghawer near Ashkout. Two other unidentified men, because they still live in Beirut under wretched conditions, carried out the ghoulish mission with Nakkour.

I am sorry indeed to bring up such sordid details, but I have to do justice to the militiamen who, I stress, were at the beck and call of their chiefs, who never questioned orders, and who never asked for payment or consideration. Today, they live in fear and poverty under repressive and retaliatory measures currently utilized in Lebanon.

Also in 1982, during the Israeli bombing of West Beirut, I was instructed to kidnap Georgina Rizk, former Miss Lebanon, who had married a Palestinian leader, Hassan Salameh and had their son, Ali. Georgina Rizk had fled to her sister's house in Ashrafieh. It was early in the morning. I took one of the boys with me in a large American car. We stormed into the house and forced her out in her nightgown, together with her little son and sister and another woman, a friend of theirs married to a top flight Palestinian officer.

I personally handed them over to H.K. in the Al Amn building. H.K, with Gaby Bustani and Assad Shaftari proceeded with the questioning which lasted late into the afternoon. Then they were driven back to West Beirut.

Today, in my lonely exile, haunted by memories, I am neither worried nor frightened that I personally participated in the assassination of some of the Shia Moslem prisoners. I carried out my orders as a soldier, kidnapped persons during the Israeli siege, out of anger and by rights, to avenge our innocent victims killed in cold blood, and in keeping with the line mapped out by our leaders.

From Israel to Damascus

CHAPTER 6: 1982 - The Assassination of Bashir Gemayal

When asked, H.K. denies responsibility for the abduction of the four Iranian diplomats, as he denies charges of every one of his crimes he ordered to preserve his sanctimonious image. On May 31, 1990, the White House confirmed, in an official statement, that the four Iranians had been killed, though no one paid heed or really wanted to believe it.

By then, power had gone to H.K's head. Nothing could happen without his knowledge and permission. Powerful and mighty, he was the only decision maker in the Christian regions. His objective was total hegemony over the Christians. The unscrupulous power-seeker had to wash away the past and everything standing in his way Following his crimes in the Al Amn security building, then against the Palestinians, he committed equally gruesome felonies against all the Lebanese Christian people and combatants. He murdered his way to the top and hen-pecked his men into the most bitter defeat. His conduct was crowned with the assassination of the president-elect Sheikh Bashir Gemayel.

The two persons who actually burnt down Lebanon, and cursed its people were Elie Hobeika and Assaad Hardane. Assad Hardane masterminded Bashir's death among many of his crimes against the Christian people! On August 23 1982, Bashir Gemayel, Israel's protege was elected President of the Lebanese Republic. That was the miracle! For some, it was supreme victory, for others, utter defeat. Sure of his success through muscle, money, and persuasion, he showed obvious signs of independence from the Israelis. This new approach somewhat assured him of the support of the mainstream Moslem leadership, and won him over the United States government's unmitigated support. H.K. enjoyed a strong windfall when the United States backed his operations. He did not have any compunction to flatly turn down Israel's insistent demands for an immediate peace treaty.

On September 1, 1982, Bashir Gemayel held that ultimate meeting with Israel's Premier Menahem Begin in Nahariya. The meeting was later proclaimed a "bad" meeting for both sides. The Israelis were stifled with his ingratitude. He was steadfast in his position: He believed that he had a better and stronger ally, the World's Number one superpower, the United States of America. The Israelis struck hard and leaked news of the meeting and what had been agreed upon. The president elect was so taken in by his capacity to win, dazzle and impress that he did not realize the Israeli command had decided to pull out the carpet, from under his feet. But the Syrians did. They had never accepted his election to the highest state office. Their agents were not dearth. It was time to strike, and eliminate the ultimate Christian leader-president who was then unpunished. Use of their agents within the Lebanese Forces was carried out to even the score. The purpose of the attack was two-fold. First, to tarnish Israel's reputation world-wide, and with the Lebanese Forces stymied, then shroud the Christian ranks with further confusion and disruption. The Syrians could then force their way back to recover full control of Lebanon, and tighten their grip on it.

On Tuesday September 14, 1982, at precisely 4:10 P.M, an explosion destroyed the three-story building that housed the main East Beirut branch of the Kataeb Party. Bashir Gemayel was inside the building for one last meeting with the party members and supporters. Bashir, the 34-year-old president-elect, nine days before he was due to take office for his six-year term, had grown careless in the prevalent euphoria of his newly acquired power and position. Oversight on Bashir Gemayel's part and his new antagonism towards the Israelis, allowed his enemies to successfully attack and kill him. Bashir was careless. The Special Security Unit conducted by Elie Wazzen, alias "Abbas", who coordinated with H.K supplied Wazzen with information. Elie Wazzen profited during the year he commanded the unit, because he orchestrated all arms deals. The least he could do was to take good care of his «master» when the need arose!

The explosion was reported a few minutes after it took place. Elie Hobeika dispatched me to inspect the premises. I was accompanied by the Israeli Liaison officer called Mandy. As we struggled through the rubble, we saw bits of arms, legs, heads and shoulders strewn among the collapsed pillars. A gray-black cloud of dust and smoke billowed through the neighborhood. The street in front of the collapsed building was crammed with hysterical people crying and bellowing. Sheikh Bashir's wife, Solange, arrived a few minutes after us. Karim Pakradouni, Gemayel's close political adviser shuttled in his Range Rover between the explosion site, Rizk Hospital and Hotel Dieu before identifying the President -elect's obliterated body.

By 6:00 p.m., the tension had become unbearable. The rescue workers were trying to clear the rubble under arc lights. I was there with «Mandy» who could not keep from crying. A wave of hallucinations seemed to take hold of the crowd. Everybody, even the most noted international pressmen, dreamed they had seen an ambulance carrying Bashir away, an ambulance which, in fact, never existed except in their ravaged minds.

Later, a helicopter flew overhead and was driven off by the random shooting. Rumors started circulating like a flash in the pan, when somebody in the panic-stricken and angry

crowd shouted that it was an Israeli helicopter sent to take Bashir to a hospital in Israel. But none of this was true and we knew it. The Israelis had the confirmation of Bashir's death long before the Lebanese forces did. They had the firm certitude at 8.30 p.m. while the Lebanese Forces command waited until Gemayel's body was removed at 10:00 p.m. and carried by a Red Cross ambulance to the Hotel-Dieu.

Collective hallucination mixed with mass hysteria and chaos blurred common sense. There, clamped down in front of the battered building, stood aghast rescue workers, family members, mentors, Kataeb party officials, members, supporters, friends, medical teams, military and militiamen.

Instead of six years in office, Bashir, had only 23 days, but 23 days during which a myth was born. A myth that would soon become a stumbling block and an element of strife and conflict within the Christian ranks: Christian decision-makers, Lebanese forces, clans, Presidency.

The assassination of Bashir Gemayel pushed his tough, ruthless and bloodthirsty lieutenants, and the Israelis into a hysterical rage and enraged them to vow vengeance. Sharon and Begin panicked. It is true that Bashir had disappointed them by turning down their peace treaty proposal, but they knew he would restore peace, law and order and shake off the Palestinian and Syrian tutelage. He was likely to bend in the end because with him they secured, at least a friendly Christian-dominated regime in Lebanon.

In the meantime, Gemayel's political adviser Karim Pakradouni, and the Lebanese Forces commander Fady Frem had in the meantime agreed to contain the militiamen. Shooting was prohibited. Meetings at the highest levels were held through the night. Beirut Radio, Kataeb Party's Radio Voice of Lebanon, Bashir's Radio Free Lebanon interrupted their usual programs and broadcast classical music without one single comment.

The assassination of Bashir Gemayel destroyed the Christians ultimate dream. It sullied Israel's honor, undermined American credibility and above all, ushered to an era of bloody inter-Christian feuds, treason and battles that led to the collapse of the power of the Lebanese Christian people who were burnt down by the leaders who took over.

From Israel to Damascus

CHAPTER 7: The Massacres at Sabra and Shatilla

On the morning of Wednesday, September 15, 1982, the Lebanese forces met at the Gemayel house in Bickfaya. The house was crammed with mourners, and the attendees decided to run Amin, Bashir's brother, for the president. While all of Lebanon's religious, political, military and civilian leaders and Minister Sharon and the Head of the

Mossad passed through the room where condolences were extended, an invasion of West Beirut was being planned. It went off 12 hours later.

In the afternoon of Wednesday September 15, 1982, Bashir's military and Intelligence lieutenants met with the Israeli chief of Staff Lieutenant General Rafael Eitan, and Major General Amir Drori, in charge of the Lebanese operation.

I was later told by Hobeika that there were about 2,000 PLO terrorists still hiding in the Sabra and Shatilla camps. Hobeika advised me that he was in charge of the organization of an operation to clear them out. He also disclosed that the Israeli forces had taken up positions in West Beirut and expected us to supervise the evacuation of the Palestinians from the camp. We were to sort out the armed terrorists and hand them over to the Israeli troops at the Cite Sportive, Al Madina Al Ryadieh, cleaned up and fixed to serve as a rally point. Meanwhile, the whole country stood breathless and at a standstill, half of it drowned in deep despair, and the other half paralyzed with fear. So ominous was the tragedy.

Hobeika had 24 hours to prepare his elite key force composed of 200 men. The men were allotted in several units respectively under the command of Joseph Asmar, Michel Zouein, G. Melco, and Maroun Mashaalani. General Sharon besieged the camps and the Cite Sportive.

By noon on Thursday, September 16, 1982, the Shababs started advancing through the Beirut Airport Road. By 4:30 p.m., the Lebanese Forces had crossed the Israeli lines surrounding the camps. Sharon had given strict orders to Hobeika to guard against any desperate move, should his men run amuck. They were to behave like a real dignified, regular army not like "chocolate soldiers" and coordinate with the Israeli command. Their mission was to exert pressure an the Palestinians to drive them all out of the camp, and pick out the PLO agents left behind after the evacuation of the Palestinians in August, 1982. They were rallied at the Cite Sportive and held prisoners. After inspection the civilians would be sent back to their homes. However, Hobeika gave his own instructions to his men: "Total extermination ... camps wiped out."

It was Maroun Mashaalani's men, undaunted by their regular and immoderate use of heroine and cocaine who perpetrated the most ghastly slaughters in the camp bordering Ghaza Hospital at the entrance of Sabra. That is where foreign nurses and doctors were shot down in cold blood. The minute General Ariel Sharon had been informed that something odd and unwanted was going on, he summoned his commanding officers and Hobeika.

At 7:30 p.m. on September 16, 1982, Hobeika and I arrived at General Ariel Sharon's Headquarters. We climbed up to the terrace of the tall building next to the Kuwaiti Embassy. From there we could plunge right into the camp and have an overhead view. Besides the Israeli officers, Assad Shaftari, Michel Zouein, Elie Hobeika and myself were poised and ready.
The Israeli officers were jealous and filled with rage, blaming Hobeika for actually

ordering the massacre of Palestinian civilians. Hobeika coldly retorted that it was because of the darkness he could not tell who they were. General Sharon, being too fat to climb up the flight of stairs, waited on the second floor to see Hobeika and have it out with him personally. The minute he saw him he roared out: "You were not supposed to do this. I didn't ask you to commit massacres. If I wanted, I would have done so with my tanks. You'll pay dearly for this blunder!" Hobeika replied that he would handle it with his men. Hobeika and I went back on the terrace. Hobeika got a walkie talkie message from a guy called Paul saying, "There are women and children, what should we do?" Hobeika answered, "It's your lookout and don't call me back again, you shit."

Hobeika, Zouein, Shaftari and I ran back down to the second story where an Israeli officer drew a map of the site with a piece of chalk on the floor, pointing to where the massacres were taking place. That is when we had confirmation that it was Maroun Machaalani's unit which was involved at the entrance of Sabra Camp.

Hobeika went back to report to General Sharon his account of events. General Sharon ordered his men to fire flares from that moment on until 4:00 a.m. to avoid a further blunder. It was too late. The harm was done. All the victims were civilians killed with grenades, hatchets, assault rifles, knives. Some of the corpses were even boobie-trapped.

At around 6:00 a.m., the Lebanese Forces, arrived to inspect the butchery. Fadi Frem, Fuad Abou Nader, Steve Nakkour, Elie Hobeika and I inspected the premises. Hobeika instructed Nakkour, who was in charge of Logistics, to send tractors to clean up the camps and leave no traces of the massacres, wiping out incriminating evidence.

The Israeli officers prevented the Lebanese Forces from getting into the camps with their chiefs. At 9:00 a.m., artillery fighting broke out between Maroun Mashaalani's men and gunmen from Moslem Shia Mekdad family members. The Mekdad families came to inquire about their relatives who were among the camp inhabitants. A Lebanese army officer ordered Mashaalani to get off to stop the skirmish. He complied.

By now, news accounts of the massacres had leaked out. The reports became amplified, confused, and mixed-up. Some witnesses claimed that it was actually Major Saad Haddad's men who had perpetrated the slaughter because of the South Lebanon accent. Not one single man from Saad Haddad's Free Lebanon Army took part in the operation. The Christian militia was unchained and blinded by rage after the assassination of their Chief, President and martyr.

Once again, the mastermind, Hobeika had toyed with the lives of young patriots, committing them to carry out reprehensible actions which could serve only Syria's interests! It was the Syrians, not the PLO who had never accepted Bashir's election. It was later discovered and proven that Bashir's actual assassin, Habib Tanios Shartuni, was a secret member of the pro-Syrian, anti-Kataeb Party, Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SNSP). The SNSP was represented by Assaad Hardane via Nabil Al Allam Chief of Intelligence and Security of the SNSP. Syrian Army Intelligence conducted by Ali Douba assisted Shartuni in providing and stashing the bomb. How could Hobeika claim

that he had received orders to massacre the Palestinians from the Israelis? I did not know where his two ultra secret meetings with Abdul Halim Khaddam during the first half of 1982 fit in.

I was Hobeika's field man always present on the premises with my chief wherever he went. I can state under oath, that General Sharon would never have lit up the area the way he did had he planned for any butchery. He would not have cleaned up the Cite Sportive to house all the Palestinians pending their return to their homes after verification. He would not have placed his tanks and armored cars all around the camps to capture the remaining armed Palestinian agents. One thing was certain, the Syrians had their men within the ranks of Lebanese Forces leaders.

Reflecting back on the events of my life, all the facts led me to believe that Hobeika was the man, who in 1982, provoked the Sabra and Chatilla massacres. This is my own assumption of what was behind it because there are no real facts to support my claim. After killing Bashir Gemayel, in secret coordination with the SNSP and Syria, I also suspected Hobeika was instrumental in the fall of the Likoud Government. Prime Minister Begin and General Sharon resigned, allowing the Labor Party in Israel to come to power. This rise reversed the process and destroyed everything the Likud Government had worked to establish with the Lebanese Christians.

Bashir's death and the massacres were pivotal in the fall of the Likoud Government. It is alleged that Hobeika contributed to the destruction of the Likoud Government plan for Israel and Lebanon because of his participation in the events. While Syria was working for a new consensus with the United States, Hobeika became a pro-Syrian and a Hafez Assad hero. Hafez Assad personally placed a protective umbrella over Hobeika's head to avert any assassination attempts on Hobeika's life following the massacres of the Sabra and Shatilla camps.

The assassination of Bashir and the attacks on Sabra and Shatilla also led to the fall of power for General Sharon and Prime Minister Begin. Hobeika's actions changed the course of events. Israel lost power and Syria gained it. It was the same mechanism that destroyed the courageous Israeli Government's plan to save Lebanon and restore peace through a solid and strong Christian state. Following Bashir's death and the failed Likud/Israeli plan, the United States then entered the Middle-East conflict with a new consensus and perspective different from the original Israeli perspective. The Labor Party took control of the Israel government and compromised the Lebanese Christians with Syria. Rabin stated many times, he would not mind for Syria to stay in Lebanon should Syria sign the peace treaty with Israel. When Netanyahu took office, the whole middle eastern peace plan changed.

Five years after Hafez Assad kidnapped the American and western hostages through the Hizballah in Beirut, and released them later in Damascus. He did so to gain the blessings of the United States political power. The United States attempted to a deal with the Labor Party, headed by Rabin in Israel, Assad released 5,000 Syrians Jews from Damascus and authorized them to leave Syria and travel to the United States. The United

States was blessing a naive peace between Rabin's Israel and Syria. The Labor Party leaders believed this naive peace with Syria. Rabin backed by United States support sought a peaceful resolution to the Middle-East conflicts. What Hafez Assad and Syria wanted was the return of the Golan and Lebanon and to be in a position of strength in the balance of power in the Middle East.

Assad was loosing time. The United States Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, traveled numerous times to the bargaining table to resolve the terms of the agreement, but was unsuccessful in his diplomatic attempts. He failed because Syria never believed in Israel. Assad was counting on a change that might occur with the New World Order, perhaps a new revolution with Russia that would topple the pro-United States regime and establish the Old Soviet Union, thus returning to the Cold War. Assad could then take a power position in the Arab-Israeli conflict. This never happened. The Labor Party failed to understand the ideology that prevailed in Damascus, a denial of Israel to «exist» as a Nation in the Middle-East. Therefore, the only peace that could dominate in the region was the peace through strength. Hobeika succeeded in playing Syria's political game and Syria was fooling the United States of signing a peace treaty with Israel. The political perception of President Reagan for the Middle East was the best. Peace through strength. What Syria really wanted to do was waste time and swallow Lebanon for its own. By doing so, Syria gained economic and political strength in the region.

On October 2, 1982, 17 days after the assassination of President Bashir Gemayel, the Kataeb Party Radio Voice of Lebanon announced that the man who perpetrated the outrage, the assassin, Habib Tanios Shartuni, age 26, was captured. Strange coincidence indeed, Shartuni, his sister and grandparents occupied the top floor of the small three-story building which accommodated the Kataeb Party's Ashrafieh headquarters. A friend of mine, then in West Beirut, overheard two SNSP party leaders commenting that one of the greatest assets Hobeika gave to the Syrians was the Bashir story. One can only infer that Hobeika was behind Bashir's assassination.

Speculation of Hobeika's participation in Bashir's assassination was wide spread. Hobeika had been Syria's man inside the Lebanese Forces. Hobeika had travel numerous times with Bashir. Hobeika made many contacts there, but it was speculated that he was secretly working for the Syrian interests. The last trip Bashir made to discuss the treaty, Bashir got into a verbal conflict with Prime Minister Begin. What followed was the Syrian leader's plan to assassinate Bashir with the help of the SNSP. After the success of the operation, the leaders then devised a cover for the operation. It is reported that the Syrian Moukhabarat began circulating news that the Israelis had killed Bashir because he had gotten into a conflict with the Prime Minister Begin during their last visit in Naharia. The plan was to remove suspicion from the Syrians and color the Israelis with the crime.

Many in Lebanon do not understand why Israel would kill a man they had devoted and invested so much time and energy into gaining peace for their country. The whole Israeli project was built on Bashir. When Syria succeeded in eliminating Bashir, the whole Israel plan for Lebanon was lost. There was no leader to fill Bashir's place. Hobeika took advantage of the situation by averting the attention from the Bashir assassination to the

massacres at Sabra and Shatilla. Everyone forgot the crime against Bashir and focused their attention on the camp massacres. It was well planned and successfully carried out. Following these events, the Likud Government collapsed, Prime Minister Begin and General Sharon resigned. Alexander Haig, now the United States Secretary of State, was the man who gave his blessing to the Peace Accord, who went home without any success. Everything in Israel collapsed and Syria was getting out of the game victorious following Bashir's death.

If Bashir had continued forward with his plans in Israel, Lebanon would have been the second State in the Middle East to sign the peace treaty with Israel after Egypt. This move would have ensured a friendly government to Israel in Lebanon. The Lebanese Forces were considered the Israeli mechanism in Lebanon, with the tripartite agreement and the Intifadas, Hobeika sliced the Lebanese Forces into two pieces and took the half of it to the Syrian side when he went to Zahleh. He converted them working for the Moukhabarat Sourieh sending car bombs and executing assassinations in the Christian enclave for Syria's interest. Assad himself placed a protective umbrella over Hobeika because the Palestinians wanted to kill him and gave him a residence in Damascus and protection for the "favors" he did for Syria.

From Israel to Damascus

CHAPTER 8: The Assassination of Elias Shartouni

Since 1977, Habib Tanios Shartuni, a Maronite, was an active member of the Syrian Socialist National Party (SNSP). Shartuni was a strong and indelible ally of the Syrians. He was just a puppet, but a very useful one. The whole hierarchy pulled the strings with complete confidence, knowing that Shartuni would abide and no questions asked.

Stating with no regrets or fear, the 26-year-old Habib T. Shartuni confessed at a press conference before being handed over to the Lebanese Justice by the Lebanese Forces. Shartuni confessed, "I was given the explosives and the fancy long-range electronic detonator in West Beirut's Ras Beirut neighborhood by Nabil El Alam, Chief intelligence of the Party." Alam had close ties to the Syrian Intelligence Services and right after the assassination fled to Syria and vanished into thin air, the Syrians would operated with the Secret Services of an eastern country. It was speculated that this eastern country was the Soviet Union with its potent and powerful ambassador Alexander Soldatov who, some believe, engineered part, if not all of the war in Lebanon.

Shartuni advised that on the night of September 13, 1982, he sneaked onto the second floor of the building housing the Kataeb Party Office in Ashrafieh. His behavior did not arose suspicion because he lived on the third floor with his sister and grandparents. He

got into the room right above the platform on which Bashir and his companions would be seated and stashed about 40 to 50 kgs of high explosives.

The next afternoon Shartuni stuck around the place until he made sure Bashir arrived, and walked out of the building. Shartuni ran to the sector of Nasra with the detonator. Right after the blast Shartuni walked back to the premises to check the result.

Hardly three months after being handed over to Gemayel, Habib Sharttini's mother, father and uncle, on his father's side, were assassinated on Hobeika's personal orders. Their murderer was a relative of theirs, Elias Shartuni, a close friend and benefactor of H.K. They were immediately buried in the Nahr sector known as Sa'et el Abed between Nahr and Furn El Shebbak. Elias Shartuni was not just a Lebanese Forces Commander, he was a good friend to all. He was lavish, had plenty of money and knew how to spend it thriftlessly. Easy come, easy go, he used to say, and always had his hand in his pocket with us.

Shartuni started to call on the Lebanese Forces Security Council members, namely Butros Khawand, Fuad Abu Nader, Elias el Zayek, Fady Frem and told them how he had been generous with H.K. and how, in return, he had bound him to bump off Habib's folks. Hobeika having ears everywhere heard about Shartuni's brash talk and foamed with rage. To Hobeika, E. Shartuni was getting too dangerous to his liking. He had to be wiped out. It was true Shartuni was very useful to him in every way, but the odds were against him.

When H.K decided to eliminate E. Shartuni, he asked me to plan and carry out his assassination. I kept putting off the execution order because Shartuni was a friend of mine. I just could not get myself to do it and I could not help recalling how this man I was asked to shoot used to offer me and the boys of H.K's close protection team, large tips, and expensive leather jackets. It was true that he made a fortune with drugs, getting commissions from all drugs smuggled out of Lebanon. For the first time, I stalled and overlooked Hobeika's orders.

In the end, Hobeika gave up nagging me and sent Joseph El Asmar to shoot Shartuni. Asmar did shoot Shartuni down in broad daylight as he was stepping out of the Barber's shop in Mar Yuhanna, Ashrafieh. Habib Tanios Shartuni never knew that his parents had been killed in cold blood, for no reason except that they had a criminal son, and without even an elementary burial, by Elias Shartuni, a kin, the bodies were dumped under a tree.

Now that Bashir's murderer was in the Lebanese Justice hands, Amin Gemayel had scored a victory against the Lebanese Forces War Council. The Lebanese Forces adamantly refused to hand him over. Amin was elected president six days after Bashir's death and two days after the massacres of Sabra and Chatilla. With Israeli backing, Amin knew that the honeymoon between him and the Lebanese Forces was over and that he would have to cross swords with them over major issues. Both sides had too much at stake. Rivalry and betrayal set in. Bashir's death had triggered renewed intercommunal strife for power and money!

No sooner was Bashir buried, than his lieutenants, free from his control, began vieing for political position and power, planning, shifting alliances, never true to themselves or to each other. Their actions and options were dictated by a frantic race for power, unconcerned about their Christian community. Fadi Frem, Fuad Abou Nader, Elie Hobeika, Samir Geagea and Karim Pakradouni, were now focused on striking secret alliances and scheming against each other. All of these leaders, except Pakradouni, were trained in Israel and had good friends and strong links there. Frem and Abou Nader had no elbow room with regard to their connection with President Amin Gemayel. Paralyzed by family ties, Hobeika, Geagea and Pakradouni soon became the "Intifadists", the future mutineers. Each was different in age, education and temper, but they were united by their common dislike and conflict with the President and the Kataeb Party. The stronger bind was their momentary need for each other to build their position and power.

Hobeika considered Samir Geagea a tough highlander without a shred of political sense and no real ambitions except military capability. Hobeika placed Geagea as the taxi-levier at the Barbara checkpoint to gain his favor.

Like Bashir, Hobeika had always had a cynical and contemptuous view of his own militia men and the Christian citizens. Unlike Bashir, Hobeika was more subtle, and subversive in his approach than others. After the Sabra and Shatilla massacres, the division between General Ariel Sharon and Hobeika was consummated. Hobeika did not seem concerned. He made a complete reversal without compunction. He thought he had a stronger and better paying ally.

Like Bashir after the Safra Operation, Hobeika after Sabra and Shatilla and his break off with Ariel Sharon, backed by the Syrians and their Man in Lebanon, Assad Hardane, set out to burn Lebanon and crush the Christians. Hobeika's attributed role was to knock the Christians down on their knees. From the start, the motto Hobeika and the other leaders instilled into us was, "we'll never ever kneel down."

Hobeika high-handy ordered the massacre of Christians, beginning with the Ahrar, Chamoun's National Liberal Party members, and militants who dared remain in sectors under his control. Hobeika ended his killing spree with his own loyal followers and fighters most of whom were from Karm el Zeitoun and Hay El Syrian, his pillars and mainstay, and for whom he never had any regard. The best example was Issam Awwad and George Massoud from Karm. Hobeika disliked them, but needed them for his dirty jobs. They were tough, ruthless and fearless and absolutely loyal to him. They were executed in cold blood, under the supervision of Zahleh Chief Executioner Fadi Saroufim assisted by Karim Hankash known as Gilbert Baz, and Ibrahim Haddad known as Jean Abdel Messih./

Earlier in 1983, he ordered the assassination of a great number of Tigers. One was Laila Moawad from Ayn Remaney. She was assassinated on the false pretense that she was a double agent. Her corpse was dumped in a pit. A number of top Tiger officers experienced the same fate. Kindo, Joseph Abou Yunes, Al Tayyar was killed in front of his Ayn Remaneh home. Al Abbutt was killed in the hospital where he was under

medical care for his wounds. The targets also included: Joseph and Jean Ba'yzek; Al Arnab; Samir Al Vito; Roukoz Al Assouf, Chaker el Haddad; Assaad Ghanem; Elie Kafah; three brothers from the Alya family; and, a newly married police officer from the Noujeim family who was charged with coordination with the Tigers and executed for his alleged crimes.

Hobeika ordered the assassination of Elias Moussa, a Lebanese army commando officer. Moussa was killed at the Defense Ministry in Yarze because he was suspected of having arrested Hobeika and Melco at one time. Elias Nemr, alias «Secam», member of the Al Amn Militia, was killed in cold blood, in his prison cell in Yarze. He was killed because he was a Lebanese Forces top leader and possessed crucial information about Hobeika and his operations. Hobeika was fearful that Moussa might break down and come clean.

Hobeika also ordered the assassination of a great number of Amin Gemayel's militants: Milan Abou Khalil, thrown in Kanater Al Zbeidi; Camille Sarkis, in Douar; and, Tanios Al Khoury, killed in front of the Lebanese University in Fanar. Elias Nemr fled to Canada for political asylum under unbearable pressure.

With his notorious muteness and mystery halo, he crushed whatever and whoever stood in his way. Hobeika was «H.K.», the rest were slaves! His only objective after the breakup with General Sharon was to consolidate and gain the highest favors of the quintessential Syrians. The Syrians were now an extremely attractive ally to snatch from Amin Gemayel. With Bashir out of the way, Hobeika could unleash his zenith ambition.

To hit the mark, Hobeika terrorized the Christians bringing them to their knees. That was all the Syrians would want from him. Syria's number two man in command, Abdul Halim Khaddam, told him once in front of me, Cobra, control the ground, you hold the decision." His campaign of muscles and charm began to work out, unaware as he was, or too arrogant to realize that the Syrians use other people and cannot be used. He aimed higher than his friend, Rifaat Assad, within the Syrian command. To combat the Kataeb Party, and the Lebanese Forces War Council, specially the newly elected pro-Amin Commander Fuad Abou Nader, he wanted no less than Abdul Halim Khaddam on his side. He schemed and plotted. Strong with the Kataeb Party's total support, he was the Party's pet, especially Joseph Saadeh's plant and the Lebanese Forces bogey.

Earlier when they refused to hand over Bashir's assassin for prosecution to Amin Gemayel, the Lebanese Forces were showing their lack of faith in Amin and their determination to trip up the State. Habib Tanios Shartuni was kept in Hobeika's jail because, as rumors started circulating, Shartuni involved the Lebanese Forces in the assassination! Shartuni and his family were all members of the pre-war banned Syrian People's Party, Al Hizb Al Kawmi Al Souri, now the SNSP. They were allowed to live in the building accommodating the Ashrafieh Branch of the Kataeb Party.

Jean Nader, then Chief of that important Section and one of Bashir's closest assistants in charge of The Kataeb Party National Fund and the Lebanese Forces' finances, had kicked them out during the two-year war then allowed them back. Since then, he was said

to be having an affair with Shartuni's younger sister! Nader was killed in the blast and the question has remained without definite answer.

From Israel to Damascus

CHAPTER 9: Hobeika, Chief of Intelligence

Bashir and Amin Gemayel had always been arch enemies and fierce rivals. The only thing holding them and Lebanon together was their father and founder of the Kataeb Party, Sheikh Pierre Gemayel. After Bashir's assassination, the Lebanese Forces decided to run Amin for President. The decision was obviously dictated by feelings of grief and bereavement, fanatic attachment to the Kataeb Party from which they all came, and to cut the ground from under President Camille Chamoun's feet, as he had the favors of the Israelis.

Unlike Bashir, Amin had been a Parliamentarian since 1970 and had no strong foreign «connections». He provided the family, the Kataeb Party and the Lebanese Forces with continuity, though on a much weaker level. That was a plus to the Lebanese Forces commanders.

On the popular level, the Lebanese Forces were considered the shield of Lebanon, its pride and strength. They were taken at their face value. The Lebanese Forces leaders knew that if they backed the President of the Republic, even though only superficially, he would owe it to them for a while and leave them free-handed. He would just be a «bridge». Deep down the Lebanese Forces leaders disliked and distrusted Amin. They planned to cripple him later should he branch off from their control.

A shrewd politician and aware of the Lebanese Forces leaders' feelings for him, Amin Gemayel decided to set their minds at ease, and gain Christian support through them. Amin's first move upon taking office on September 23, 1983, was to pay a visit to the War Council. At the meeting Amin pledged to the War Council that he would follow in Bashir's footsteps. Suspicion prevailed. Bashir's wife, Solange had to intervene personally to contain the hot-heads at the meeting. Obviously each had an unfathomable scheme to do away with the other. Each was aware that the *preuve de force* had started. This latent antagonism was understandable.

Amin had been a leading candidate in pro-Syrian Moslem eyes, though supported by the Israelis. Bashir was elected President against the wishes of the Syrians and Moslems. Amin often declared that Israel's objective was to destroy Lebanon's role in the region. He always recommended pacification, compromise and dialogue with the Syrians.

Contrary to Amin's words in 1983, I personally handed him messages from General Sharon at his Presidential Palace in Bikfaya, messages he was receiving through Hobeika. On Christian and military levels, Bashir's heirs remained the strongest and most popular. On the political level, the message was well received by the Syrian command that promptly sent a special emissary to their Maronite friend and ally, President Soleiman Franjieh, to make clear to him, despite his hatred for the Gemayel's, that they were determined to do business with President Amin Gemayel this time.

This alliance left little time and no elbow room for Hobeika to maneuver. He had six years , by Amin's mandate, to battle with him in an open rivalry over the Syrian favors, thus paralyzing his actions. Amin cinched it and built up his own parallel military and political forces and institutions in his Northern Matn fiefdom. He had strong Moslem support, backed by the Syrians and the Kataeb party politbureau. Amin pressed the Lebanese Forces to disarm, hand over the fifth basin of the Port of Beirut. This port was a golden goose egg held by Jean Basmarii and Jean Bteghrini. He asked them to hand over the "National Fund" and all of the assets managed by Jean Assaf. The clincher was the dismantling of the Barbara checkpoint, another goldmine held by Samir Geagea.

After weeks of prodding, the Lebanese Forces accepted to truck their arms out of East Beirut, into mountain areas, but adamantly refused to comply with the other demands. Trouble was brewing. Fadi Frem, Commander of the Lebanese Forces, appointed by Bashir before his assassination considered Amin's election as President a serious setback in Bashir's political line. He was paralyzed by family ties. Frem married Fuad Abou Nader's sister, which was Amin's niece. He was well educated, an engineer and graduate from a United States Academy. Frem came from a rich bourgeois family.

Hobeika did not share this background. Frem was less enigmatic and uncanny than Hobeika. Frem was Chief of the Intelligence Service of the Lebanese Forces in 1978, one of the toughest and bloodiest years of the war. In 1981, Frem became Chief of Staff, a post he had handed over to Samir Geagea when he was promoted Commander. However, the man lacked boldness force and charisma.

The players in the Christian arena were the President, the Kataeb Party, the hardline "Independentists" of the Lebanese Forces and the «moderate» Lebanese Forces. Each, for a specific reason wanted to bring down Frem. When his mandate expired, each of the players planned to place the Commander that suited their ends into power.

The scales tipped in favor of the candidate of The Presidency and the Kataeb Party, Fuad Abou Nader. Nader was a 28-year-old medical doctor and Amin's nephew. He was appreciated by the militiamen for his courage on battlefields and on the fronts. He had been Chief of Operations and Chief of Staff from 1982 to 1984. Nader's uncle, Amin, was aware that he would have a hold on him. He was right in his reckoning. Fuad's allegiance to his «uncle» and the Kataeb party was brought out to light after his election. While other positioned themselves, Hobeika was cleverly making a political niche for himself.

Karim Pakraduni, Bashir's close political adviser, is one of the rare Armenians to take an active part in the Lebanese war. He and Nazo, Nazir Najarian, a Kataeb Party military commander who had led Kataeb troops in the downtown area of Beirut, Al Assouak, were instrumental in the Lebanese war. In the beginning, Nazo was a decent guy who never accepted the predatory instincts of the Lebanese military chiefs. However, he too did nothing to stop the looting of the ports and watched as $700 million United States dollars were stolen.

Nazo was quoted as telling the boys down on the front, « We must resist material temptation. If we become corrupt, we will lose the war. We will be submerged and liquidated, not just here in Lebanon, but as Christians throughout the Middle East!» Nazo during the two-year war carried and expressed our dreams for a strong Christian presence in Lebanon. After Nazo's brother was killed on the front and Nazo was appointed as Commander of the Eastern Saidon area. He too began filling his pockets and paved the ground for the fall of this area and the massive Christian depopulation from this part of Lebanon.
Contrary to Nazo character, who was once a pure and idealistic field man, totally and whole heartedly devoted to the Christian cause, Karim Pakraduni was strictly a clever politician and a manipulator. From the beginning of his involvement with the Kataeb Party, Pakraduni promoted his own personal interests. Pakraduni always operated in the shadows. Although an active Kataeb Party member since his early days, Pakraduni simply could not pocket what he called "the Hegemony" of the Party's founder and President Sheikh Pierre Gemayel and tacitly of his two sons, Bashir and Amin. Pakraduni admitted it in one of his books. Sheikh Pierre, the Rock, remained the rock indeed, to the end of his life, even after the heaviest blow a man can take, Bashir's violent death, at the peak of his glory.

After Bashir's assassination, Pakraduni intuitively and cleverly sided and backed the strong man of the moment, Elie Hobeika. Pakraduni found Hobeika ambitious, ruthless and underhanded. Pakraduni enjoyed the love and admiration of the Kataeb Party leaders, including Sheikh Pierre and Bashir. He enjoyed the admiration of the power base that only sought his approbation and marks of favor.

Hobeika held an iron grip on the Kataeb Party's Intelligence Service and Security Affairs. He was a full timer, apparently loyal, and devoted to the Family, the Kataeb Party and the Christian cause. The Kataeb Party, with all its might and supremacy, committed itself to his care, and he simmered his way up undisturbed, striking secret alliances and luring supporters blindly devoted to him into believing in him and following in his footsteps. In the end, he double-crossed everybody, friends, foes, allies, and supporters!

Hobeika is a middle-class maronite townsman. Though born in his mountain village of the Kessrouan, he grew up in the Ashrafieh neighborhood of Gemeyzeh close to Marty's Square, Sahet Al Shohada. In 1975, when the war broke out, he quit school, joined the Kataeb party and carried arms. He was soon admitted in the Bejin Group, close to Bashir, under the command of Sami Khouery and George Ferides. Although he was not in the

lineage of the «clan» of college-educated high society boys, such as Fuad Abou Nader, Fadi Frem, Poussy (Massoud) Ashkar, Elias Zayek, Toni Kessrouani, Sami Khouery, Gaby and Jo Tutunji, Hobeika forced himself into the elite circle and commanded attention, because he out shone them.

Tough, ruthless, secret, and a strong supporter of muscular ways, he threw himself headlong in every front-line and killing ground. He participated in every bloody and savage deed, mayhem and maelstorm, starting with the December 6, 1975, Black Saturday massacre of Moslems staged by Jo Saade.

After the two-year war, his assignment to South Lebanon and Israel and his return to Beirut, the Kataeb Party assigned him to the Sin-el-Fil branch of the Libano-Brazilian Bank as a ghost-office boy. The branch manager was a prominent Kataeb Party member, Mr. Kahaleh. However, with the succession of military and security events, he was called back and appointed chief of Military Affairs and Third Bureau Operations and hardly ever showed up at the Bank. Since then, he got his salary check regularly until 1982, a check which I personally picked up for him for years.

It was Hobeika who created the three Elite Force Units for operations under the command of his most loyal hardline followers: Maroun Mashaalani; Joseph el Hajj, known as Abou Halka; and, George Melco. By then, Hobeika had it made.

From Israel to Damascus

CHAPTER 10: Hobeika's Intelligence Infrastructure

Even Elie Hobeika's father took advantage of his son's rise to power. His father decided to move from the war stricken neighborhood of Gemeyzeh and built a one-story house in Adonis. The house had a sewing workshop for his wife, Badr Hobeika, and a single bedroom. They only needed a small house because Hobeika lived at Al Amn headquarters. Elie Hobeika's father meet Elias Shartouni at Saint Gille Beach Compound where he used to go with a friend of his, René
Kehdo Moawad, whose father Emile owned the place.

René Kehdo Moawad was a mercantile playboy who was married to a money-loving sex seeking beauty, Marijeanne Raymond Nashaty. Marijeanne Raymond Nashaty had a younger sister, Gina. Hobeika often met Gina at the Chalet. They fell in love. Gina, was just as pretty, sexy and money-loving as Marijeanne. Their love story evolved over three months. Everyday I would pick Gina up at Pigier Technical School in Gemeyze. She was taking secretarial courses and I was to drive her to Hobeika's office at Al Amn headquarters. During the visits, I became her confidant. She shared her joys, fears and expectations with me.

As Hobeika became more involved with Gina he wanted to impress her by giving her a present. He bought her a brand new green Fiat127. Instead of appreciation, Gina flare up. She had expected a larger and more expensive vehicle to match her sister's. Her greed was revealed. That was a portion of things to come. The conflict blew over, and she and Hobeika were married three months later.

Elias Shartouni, who commanded the Sa'et El Abed Lebanese Forces barracks for Drugs and Arms, was rolling in money. He wanted favors from Hobeika. He offered to build a apartment for him on top of his mother's workshop, furnish it luxuriously and deliver it key in hand. The explosive combination was all set. René wised him up, Shartouni showered him with money, and he had power.

A pompous wedding ceremony with a lavish military display was held at the Christ Roi Church. The Wedding Office was celebrated by Reverend Father Boulos Naaman, then head of the Maronite Monks Order, and Father Karam. A grand cocktail party followed at the ATCL Club in Kaslik. From there, the newlyweds left on a honeymoon trip to Israel with Rend K. Moawad aboard a military motor launch.

Upon his return from his honeymoon trip to Israel, he set out to expand and reorganize the Intelligence and Security Service. Hobeika planned to turn his command into an independent Bureau with sections which he partly entrusted to his loyal followers. He appointed Tony Araman as head of border security; Gaby Bustany, prisons and arrests; Emile Eid, investigations and questioning; Michel Zouein, security operations; Elias Shartuni, drugs and arms; Maroun Mashaalani, special operations; and, Paul Ariss, finance.

Headquarters was then situated behind the East Beirut Fire Brigade, in Poussy Massoud Ashkar's barracks. With the new Organization, Hobeika chose to set up, in a separate building, also in Ashrafieh, the divisions of Intelligence, Security and Records which he placed under the command of Assad Shaftari and Pierre Rizk.

I, Robert Hatem, COBRA, was responsible for Hobeika's own personal protection and security. As such, I was stronger and more powerful than all of them single or united.

Barely a few months after the AMN shuffle, with his notorious ambition, and reckless sense of grandeur, he reshaped the newly created Services and moved all them next to the War Council Headquarters in the Karantina, behind the Sleep Comfort furniture factory. Hobeika appointed himself Chief Commander and promoted Assad Shaftari as Assistant Commander. He entrusted Gaby Bustany with Prisons and Investigations, Mario Simonides with Foreign Intelligence, Joseph Asmar with Internal Intelligence, Michel Zouein with Operations, Paul Ariss with Finance, and Percy Kemp with Information and Media. He also created new divisions and appointed Gaby Eid, as Headquarters Security Chief, and Jessy Succar as the Chief Engineer. Elias Shartouni was kept at his post to deal with Drugs and Arms, in a separate Command post in Sa'et Al Abed/Nahr. From that time on, Hobeika, became a name that made all Eastern regions stand in awe and fear. Nothing could be done without his personal permission.

From what I personally saw and heard, as his shadow, I soon learned that Intelligence Services of many countries were astounded by his capacity at handling the situation in the 800 square kilometers of the Christian fiefdom. They got in touch with him for an exchange of services. The United States of America offered his assistants a 45-day training course at Langley, Virginia in the United States at the C.I.A. Base. He sent Gaby Bustany, Mario Simonides, Pierre Rizk and Jessy Succar. Pierre Rizk, the notorious Akram, out classed everyone. When he came home, proud and unbearably conceited, a considerable number of enemies were made by him. Rizk was extremely efficient but had his own personal style and would take orders from no one. Assad Shaftari hated and dreaded him and was closer to Hobeika, by his double dealing. Therefore, he managed to set Hobeika up against "palesnake", as Akram was named just out of spite.

Pierre Rizk, however, was hard to uproot, but they had to have him out of the way, whatever the cost. They searched and schemed, and finally accused him of having embezzled 100,000 Lebanese pounds, hardly twenty-five hundred ($2,500) United States dollars from the black safe. This was an absurdly low amount but enough to kick him out of the Intelligence outfit.

It was at this period that one of the Commanders of Intelligence and Security Military Units, Louis Aoun, better known as Oscar, was killed in the Kessrouan town of Ghosta. Nobody ever knew the real reason behind this new deadly action. However, discussions though hushed, took place in my presence. Sabah, the famous Lebanese singer had a cocaine-addicted but gorgeous daughter, Houaida. She was at the same time Oscar's mistress because he supplied her with the coke, and Shaftary's mistress for the money he filled her with, Shaftary wanted exclusive rights.

From Israel to Damascus

CHAPTER 11: Kataeb Politburo Expels Geagea

Between 1981, 1982 and 1985, the Lebanese Forces and the Christians suffered important military defeats. In 1981, the Battle of Zahleh had ended in a rout but had marked a stupendous political victory and a turning point in the Lebanese war. The war expanded, marked by dramatic developments until October 13, 1990, the budge on-stroke that knocked down that Lebanese Christians.

Amin Gemayel was President of the Republic. The Christians had more or less saved their entity. In 1982, Israel had an upper hand on every level, in 1984, Syria had succeeded in sweeping back, in force, on the formerly lost territory. It was after the suspension of the May 17th Accord between Lebanon and the State of Israel, and the dire policy of the Christian leaders who then pulled the strings.

From September 13, 1983, until February, 1984, Lebanon was also blasted by a heart wretching defeat and rout in the Chouf and Aley Mountain. The Lebanese Forces were bereaved of a champion to follow and support, a charismatic, clairvoyant and impressive leader, one with the "Baraka", that divinely inspired luck, to guide and back them to victory. The Lebanese Forces, flagged by internal rifts and clashes of interests, had ventured head long into a Druze-Christian region strong with Israeli military and political support. The Israelis had lost faith in them because they smelled backlash and backfire. After a smashing, but allegory victory, the Lebanese Forces, left on their own without leadership, suffered the most serious setback in the history of the war. The Army left its scar on the Christian community and detonated the latent feuds between their Chiefs.

Amin Gemayel had backed out of his promise to help the Lebanese Forces by dispatching Lebanese army troops to take over from the Israelis who had decided to pull out from the area as a symbol of annoyance. Gemayel kept stalling in the hopes of annihilating the Lebanese Forces that blocked his action. The Lebanese militia men, under the command of Samir Geagea, were in total disarray, outnumbered by the Druze, backed by the Syrians and Fatah dissidents. The battle was murderous. Thousands of innocent Christian civilians were massacred and those who could, fled in wretched conditions. The Chouf and Aley became a Druze fiefdom with not a single Christian among them. Harsh and loud arraignment against Amin Gemayel was voiced. He became the target of sharp criticism, scorn, indeed grudge.

Samir Geagea, commander of the Lebanese Forces in the Chouf said in an outcry of anger, "Amin Gemayel's main objective was the annihilation of the Lebanese Forces so he could be the only Spokesman and Savior of the Christians."

More than ever before the fracture in the Christian ranks went deeper. Unrest increased and expanded. The Lebanese Christian society began to reject any idea of a State controlled Nation. They would rather defend a Christian fiefdom where they would feel safe and proud. Isolation for a better protection became a motive power.

In the meantime, Amin Gemayel was trying to put the pieces together of his shadow State. His first move after the abrogation of the May 17th Accord, was his first official visit to Damascus. It was March 6, 1984. Six days later, on March 12, 1984, the Lebanese traditional political leaders, both Christians and Moslems, as well as Druze and Shiite militia commanders were meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland. All except the Lebanese Forces were represented. Walid Jumblat and Nabih Berri, self assured and arrogant with their recent victories owed entirely to the Syrian backing, and Israeli lack of faith in the new Christian leadership, believed for a moment they had it made.

In Beirut, fostered and stimulated by popular support, and frustrated to be blatantly ignored, the Lebanese forces announced they were unconcerned with the discussions and results of the Conference, for it only aimed at consolidating Syrian hegemony over Lebanon. They confirmed they were ready for war against the Syrian forces and their allies, whatever the price.

The power-base was all the more despoiled because only the Syrians were to blame for their misfortune and the damage done to them and they were now granted every right in Lebanon. The outcome of the Lausanne Conference somehow reinforced Syrian predominance. They were the victors and would crush and hold the Christians in their grip.

The Lebanese forces decision-making Troika - Hobeika, Geagea and Pakraduni decided it was the right time to strike and safeguard their place in the Christian fiefdom. They first disregarded Amin's orders to close down illicit ports and dismantle the Barbara checkpoint. The two were interlocked. Arms, goods, drugs and fuel were forwarded through them. They yielded fortunes no one could possibly do without. The insurrection plan was put forward . Samir refused to comply because the stakes were too high. The war treasure had to be preserved. Of the three men, only Samir Geagea was in the front. Hobeika and Pakradouni laid low.

On March 11, 1984, the Kataeb Party politbureau decided to expel Samir Geagea from the Party. The following day, the Intifada was underway. The three hardline Independentists of the Kataeb Party were not on the same wave length. However, they got together on a common ground and for a common objective to bring their power-dream to fulfillment, and at the same time reinforce popular support, each for himself.

Bashir's myth was revived. The base and the people were reminded of Bashir's line and spirit . Bashir who dared venture with dangerous foreign allies and never gave up hope. Bashir who had led the Christian people from one miracle to the next and turned every defeat into victory and every promise into a dream fulfilled! The power-base had already come around to the way of thinking and planning of the three men.

Samir Geagea, was a military man, a tough guy, dogmatic, ambitious and pious like all highlanders. He managed to mislead public opinion into believing that he was a thinker, a philosopher, a mystic, and above all, a promoter of a Lebanese Christian entity, a Lebanese Christian State. He had an army of over 1,000 loyalists ready to die for him, in addition to new recruits from the Chouf. He had ready money from the Barbara checkpoint.

Elie Hobeika, the Mukhabarat man, the secret Syrian ally, operated and exercised his influence slyly. He did not need to work on anybody's feelings. He felt unbreakable. He despised and hated Geagea and he felt this was his chance, if ever, to use him then oust him. His power lay not in the number of men around him but in his occult nature and ways, and on the ascendancy he had had in the Kataeb Party since the assassination of Bashir Gemayel. His organization, the "Intelligence and Security" was, beyond all doubt, the cornerstone of the Kataeb Party and the Christian war and Cause. It was a cinch he could lure his way to the top then eliminate his opponents, the Kataeb Party leaders, the Lebanese Forces and Geagea, when the time was right.

The Troika's Third Man, of no less importance, was Karim Pakraduni, the foxy politician. He was the go-between, the smart glib-talking lawyer no one could do without,

and who could dish up the same subject in every shape. He and Hobeika successfully allayed the Kataeb Party. Amin Gemayel's suspicions grew and he entertained well founded fears. With the scene set, the opponents reassured and resting on their laurels, Pakraduni and Hobeika successfully carried out the March 12, 1985 Intifada.

From Israel to Damascus

CHAPTER 12: The First Intifada - March 12, 1985

On March 12, 1985, at dawn, a military force led by Samir Geagea moved forward from Jbeil, Byblos and rolled down the coastal line to Nahr el Kalb Tunnel, hatch to Beirut and barely a few kilometers from the outskirts of the Northern Matn. Northern Matn was under Amin Gemayel's Force 75 vigilant control.

On his way, Geagea took over all of the Kataeb and Lebanese Forces' barracks, posts and checkpoints formerly held by Fuad Abu Nader's men. The take over without resistance and without human nor material losses. The only serious opposition came at the level of Nahr Ibrahim late in the night of the 12th. A post held by Joseph el Zayek, Elias's brother, fought a battle despite the odds against him. He was a fervent and loyal supporter of the Kataeb Party. Fuad Abu Nader and was in control of his own birth place, Ghazir in the Kessrouan. Joseph el Zayek was immediately arrested, imprisoned and tortured for two weeks before being released, a broken man.

Hobeika and Joseph were considered Zaims (chieftain) in Ghazir and had all upper Kessrouan at their beck and call. Even Hobeika, a Beirut, not very popular in the mountain and Butros Khawand, held them in high esteem, even feared them, but did not like them. Kfar H'bab, where Hobeika had moved, was a residential area, at the foot of Ghazir and close to the Zayek's quarters.

Hobeika and his loyal Elite Force stormed the Baabda district and Ashrafieh, mostly faithful to him. The knot was knotted. The Lebanese Forces full control of the Christian fiefdom was achieved successfully. Lebanon's Interior Minister Michel Murr, the concealed godfather of the insurrection, was a Christian who vowed hatred for the Gemayel's and the Kataeb Party. His hatred began in the early sixties. He offered the Lebanese Forces insurrectionists ships filled with weapons of all calibers. Murr wanted Amin Gemayel's head and the New Lebanese Forces were his artillery. Murr had an intense aversion for the Kataeb Party and Amin Gemayel in particular because Amin has always lucked out. Amin had taken Murr's seat in Parliament when his uncle Maurice Gemayel died. He has never been able to win over the Kataeb Party members in the Matn region. Moreover, Murr served Hobeika, Geagea and Pakradunis' greed for power and money which he provided lavishly, not giving a damn about Lebanon or the Christians.

The main Lebanese Force's obsessive fear was that Amin would lay hands on their precious National Fund worth millions of dollars.

There were secret meetings at Michel Murr's beach chalet at Halate Seaside Compound, in the months preceding D-Day. There were always Samir Geagea, Elie Hobeika, Michel Murr and some of their close Counsels. We, the personal security guards would stand outside the Chalet, along the Beach and at the main entrance for hours, freezing in the winter cold.

With the stunning success of the Intifada, the Lebanese Forces laid hand on and secured the Kataeb Party's properties, real estate, businesses and media. Radio Voice of Lebanon and Al Amal newspapers organs of the Kataeb Party were seized. The radio station, situated in Ashrafieh-Sassine, fell without any resistance. The director, General Joseph El Hashem and his girl-friend Maggui Farah earlier appointed Editor-in-Chief were fired from their jobs, and showed out within minutes, with a suitcase, by Percy Kemp. Kemp took over and placed his own men at the radio station to run the place. The regular staff was kept on as they accepted most willingly to abide by the new rules out of fear or conviction.

With regard to Al Amal newspaper the action was more drastic and violent. Hobeika's men burst in the offices in the Karantina area, arms in hand, placed Joseph Abou Khalil, the Editor-in-Chief Director General, under arrest and appointed Sejaan Azzi to replace him. Soon afterward, however, the party secretly managed to issue a new Blue-labeled Al Amal to counter the Lebanese Forces' Red Labeled. Hobeika and Murr were not quite satisfied with how the paper reported their political opinions and guidelines. With Murr money, Al Joumhouria's paper was completely funded and vested to Hobeika, but ran by Elie Murr, Michel's son, appointed President Director General.

The Intifada was a success. Hobeika was reaching his goal, but Amin was still unbeaten and his area of influence, the Northern Matn, more than ever still loyal and staunchly devoted to him. I remember that Hobeika, Amin's mortal enemy, could not set foot there and we would get back to Kessrouan by sea, or spend the night at Michel Murr's residence in Ashrafieh.

The Troika's new objective, therefore, was to annihilate Amin Gemayel and refrain him from getting any closer to Syria. Syria, the ally everybody was after, and the race to Damascus had to be won!

The Christian Decision Movement, as the Intifada was called, was now strongly supported and applauded by the large majority of the Christian people and the militia men. Amin was indeed isolated. Even his promise to the Syrian command on his first official visit to Damascus, to put an end to the mutiny in one month, failed.

At that time, Hobeika, the winner of this venture, estimated rightly that the time was not ripe to get rid of Geagea whom he contemptuously named the "Goat herd". Leaving him aside, he raced down to the Syrians through a mediator, Michel Samaha, who oddly

enough was Amin Gemayel's Counsel for Media Affairs and President Director General of the Lebanese official Television Network.

At this particular time, all of the Christian leaders, knowingly or unknowingly, played into Syria's hands! All of them, without exception, placed their own selfish interests above any other consideration.

The Executive Committee of the Lebanese Forces was obviously a front used by Hobeika, Geagea and Pakraduni. Now there was only one prey, Amin Gemayel, the President of the Republic, who was becoming a dangerous competitor. His Achilles' heel was the Northern Matn. The decision was therefore taken to cold-hammer him there, in a quick, sudden and efficient blow.

Michel Zouein led a force of 150 Intelligence Organism militiamen storming the area on Horsh Tabet at Amin's private residence. They were deployed without clashes or resistance even from Lebanese army troops stationed in the vicinity. Amin Gemayel was in Damascus with Hafez Assad. The Coastal Northern Matn was now neutralized, the junction with the other Christian areas made and Amin Gemayel paralyzed.

The plotting machinery was in full gear to grab the leadership of the Lebanese Forces and the Christian decision. There was an inter-barracks war, physical illuminations, supporters to buy off, each action of which Hobeika and Geagea tried to impose himself, incite the "Boys" and set them up against each other.

To appraise and consolidate their personal popularity, they threw big parties. Geagea started the series with a dinner party in Mayfouk attended by Elie Hobeika and all the Lebanese Forces big shots. The rumpus came to its height when Hobeika showed up. Thundering cheering, "H.K., H.K" or "Hakim, Hakim", burst out with a well marked split in supporters cheers and adulation as to which of the two was The "One and Only", which of the two held land and men.

Another event came to confirm my fear. Toto Bridy invited Samir Geagea and Elie Hobeika to a reception at the Lebanese Forces Artillery Base in Ashrafieh sector known as Sursuk Foreign Ministry. We drove in the same car, Hobeika, Geagea and Nader Succar, from the Karantina to the base. On the way, the two men hurled reproaches, harsh remarks, and warnings at each other, in connection with their attempted hegemony over military or Intelligence forces.

Nader Succar intervened, apparently to patch-up things. Strangely enough, he was adding fuel to the fire. It was obvious their mutual hatred was too deeply rooted to be washed out. I felt that something serious was bound to happen, an ominous crack in the wall. At the door, as we were getting in, each of them tried to exploit the situation and impose himself as the real leader.

Meanwhile, fighting broke out. At the slightest sparkle and for no serious reason, the boys at two contiguous barracks in the Karantina compound pulled their weapons and

battled for over an hour. Hatred between the boys, supposedly of the same rank, settled in resulting in casualties. Although, for selfish ends, the case was quickly hushed up, each of the two men shied away from the other. Geagea turned to Amin Gemayel, to gain a new ally and cut the ground from under Hobeika's feet. Hobeika stuck to Michel Murr and Michel Samaha and openly carried through his plans to squash his opponents and win over Syrian support.

From Israel to Damascus

CHAPTER 13: The Tripartite Agreement

Until now, Elie Hobeika accepted sharing his stakes with Geagea and Pakraduni. With his fiendish mind, he used them, but kept the two of them out of his innermost circle. His Man was Michel Murr - the Bank, the Golden Goose egg, the new Elias Shartuni .

Flanked by Michel Murr and Michel Samaha, The Middle-Man between him and the Syrians, Hobeika carried out an internal Intifada, to get even with Geagea and Pakraduni, create a political disruption and hold the reins of the Executive Committee.

Hobeika had a sixth sense and did not trust any one. He had sensed that Pakraduni was not forthright enough for his liking. On one occasion, Hobeika hired an expert locksmith, Abdo Jawharji, and in my presence broke into Pakraduni's office. He was looking for incriminating documents and found it. Hobeika found a letter signed by Samir and Karim commissioning Gemayel to intervene with Syria in the name of the Lebanese Forces to stop flaring up the situation. He was enraged and had to act now.

Hobeika had previously manipulated President Chamoun's National Liberal Party. Hobeika's intervention caused a secession within its Politbureau. The secession was led by Elie Assouad and Charles Ghostine.

The structure being set and fortified, Hobeika pressed the E. Christian members to elect him Chairman. It was May 9, 1985. Disregarding all members, he bluntly announced that the Arab option for Lebanon was the only one and Syria was the fundamental part of it. It came like a thunderbolt.

Hobeika, the Intelligence Chief, was short-circuiting Gemayel, the President, Geagea, the military man and Pakraduni, the Media Chief. Hobeika was now in absolute control of all decisions for the Christians. Since then, Pakraduni's office was moved cheek-by-jawl with his, to keep a close eye on him.

It was time for Syria to make one step further to destabilize the Christian ranks. They would bring their old and new allies together in a dramatic reconciling involving

Soleiman Franjieh and Elie Hobeika. It was prepared by Karim Pakraduni. Hobeika, the commando leader, who pulled the trigger and killed Tony Franjieh, was going to be officially received by the Kataeb-hater, the Patriarch, Soleiman Franjieh into his Syrian protected fiefdom, Zghorta/Ehden.

The Syrians made sure the visit would be important and successful so that Hobeika would come out as the only decision-maker in the Eastern regions. Though outwardly Samir approved of the visit, he increased his plotting against his ally. While Hobeika was busy up in the North, Geagea bought off Maroun Mashaalani. Maroun Mashaalani was one of Hobeika's most loyal supporters. Geagea instigated Mashaalani to cause trouble in order to weaken Hobeika's position and prove that he was not the strong man he pretended to be and did not truly control the ground.

Clashes broke out between Mashaalani and Zouein in Ashrafieh/Shahrour in the barracks attached to the Al Amn. The result was three militiamen dead. It was the first sparkle. The film was rolling and so were treacheries. Samir Geagea organized a popular rally to welcome Hobeika triumphantly after his historical visit to Zghorta. The Shahrouri incident was put aside, but suspicion was growing. It was kill or die.

Pakraduni and Geagea had patched up their differences with Gemayel, as Hobeika, with Michel Samaha and Assad Shaftari pushed forward the elaboration of the « Tripartite Accord» with Damascus. Samaha was delivering information to Hobeika that Amin Gemayel was getting closer to his objective with the Syrians. The race was at crisis point.

Elie Hobeika was getting pretty nervous, although he never showed it. He appeared in reserved and cool in public, smiling and cheerful wherever he went. At this time, he was a modern Dr. Jekyl and Mr. Hyde. With his two personalities, he led a double life. One for the masses, and one for himself. Nobody except myself and a few others, knew what he was up to. Nothing leaked. The « Arab telephone « was dumb for the first time in Lebanon. To this day, I wonder who and how rumors stopped circulating altogether, giving him a free hand in his new nasty enterprise to crush the Christian people of Lebanon. He would let nothing, a slip of a tongue or a gun stop him. The Tripartite Accord was at short-range, and within striking distance.
The shameful Tripartite Accord between the Lebanese Forces, Amal and the Druze was sponsored by Syria politically and Rafik Hariri financially. The text had been cooked up during secret meetings held at intervals between Rafik Hariri, Jean Ghanem, one of Bashir's lieutenants, and a Lebanese Forces executive committee member, and a prominent journalist-editorialist from Al Nahar Arabic language daily paper known for his antagonism for Bashir, and the Christian options, Sarkis Naoum, and the middleman Michel Samaha as well as Johnny Abdo former Lebanese army Intelligence chief.

I was present at all the preliminary meetings as Hobeika's close bodyguard and trustful « watchdog». There were three major top-secret meetings. One was on the island of Crete in Greece, it lasted for three days. It was attended by Hariri, Hobeika and the close counsels. Another one was held at Hariri's residence in the suburbs of Paris. I even remember a funny incident during the flight aboard Hariri's private jet. I had noticed that

all the porcelains crockery and sets of utensils were stamped with Hariri's initials R.H., which happen to be my own R for Robert and H for Hatem. So I decided to steal as much as I could lay my hands on. Hobeika noticed and slanged me. So I put everything right back where it belonged sorrowfully.

Meetings were also held in Beirut. One was in Ashrafieh and another in Vivian Debbas' residence in Naccache in the Northern Matn. At the end of each of these meetings, whether in Lebanon or abroad, Samsonite attache-cases full of United States dollars were offered to each of the participants.

Being a messenger, I also discovered that the military part was drafted by General Michel Aoun himself, and that the bandmaster, Michel Murr bought off everyone, even Aoun to whom he offered a house in Naccache. The political part was drafted by Sarkis Naoum and Sejaan Azzi, Michel Samaha. It was reviewed and revised by former foreign minister and noted attorney, Fuad Butros. Toto (Antoine) Bridi, a Greek orthodox like Murr and Butros, and the latter protege were the link.

When everything was ready, Hobeika judged that it was high time to make the decision public. He held a gigantic rally at the Casino du Liban in the Kessrouan. It was a bright and sunny Sunday, but a bloody Sunday for the Lebanese Christians who were once more were about to witness the fiercest battle between the Christian factions.

At the same time, the Kataeb Party, under the chairmanship of Dr. Elie Karameh, the Kataeb Party's President since Sheikh Pierre's death, and an unshakable supporter and close friend of Sheikh Pierre and Amin Gemayel, organized a popular rally in the Matn. Hobeika could not accept anything to divert attention from him, so he ordered a boobie trapped car to be placed in Nahr Al Kalb and explode at the passage of his vehicle. The boobie trapped car was spotted before it went off by Amin's special security squad. Karameh was saved but the rupture between Elie Hobeika, the Kataeb Party and Amin Gemayel was consummated. The worst was yet to come. The Christians were so far away from September 1982 and from the innocence and pureness of the two-year war.

From Israel to Damascus

CHAPTER 14: Preparation for Rebellion in East Beirut

Hobeika cleverly and successfully adopted Abdul Halim Khaddam's motto "Hold the land and you rule the decision." That is why Damascus acknowledged Hobeika as the strong and trustworthy Christian leader, entitled to speak and decide in the name of the Christians. Hobeika secretly contracted with Syria, but he had gone too far in his generosity in connection with privileged relations. He granted the Damascus command more than it had ever dreamed.

Samir, sensed danger, staying on his toes and playing for time. In coordination with Amin, he was meticulously elaborating his counter attack. Hobeika's close circle, had a feeling something serious was going to happen. For the first time since I my alliance with him, I felt that my Boss was immersed in his venture, feathering his nest and completely forgetful of his environment and those persons around him. The whole affair was going to his head.

On September 9, 1985, Hobeika paid his first open and official visit to Damascus. His visit was filled with all the pomp and circumstance as the head of a delegation of loyalists including myself. They were received by Abdul Halim Khaddam and held a lengthy meeting at his office. Hostility and resentment was brewing deep down. It was just sour grapes for us boys, but the fact that we were allowed to keep our arms on, and blindly following orders, we sincerely believed we were high, mighty and unconquerable. I gathered from the look on the leaders faces after the meeting, the meeting went well.

On September 21, 1985, Hobeika paid a visit to Zahleh. Since September 8, 1985, Zahleh was under the control of the Syrian Special Brigades. Hobeika was accompanied by Michel Samaha and the Chief of Syrian Army Intelligence in Lebanon, Ghazi Kanaan. Hobeika became the first Lebanese Forces leader to set foot in the Bekaa Valley Christian town since 1981. He was invited to a banquet thrown in his honor. The Syrian command handed the Kataeb Party Headquarters over to him. The headquarters had been occupied by the Syrian troops and was returned to Lebanese Forces control as a token of confidence. This was further evidence that Hobeika was now the only acknowledged representative of the Christians.

Hobeika met with Monsignor Haddad, Elie Ferzli, the present Vice Speaker, and Khalil Hraoui. He received popular delegations from all walks of life. A few days later, the official talks between the three pro-Syrian warring parties opened in Damascus under Khaddam's personal supervision.

In the meantime, nothing seemed to fit in Beirut's Christian sector. Nothing was firmly known. So the moment concrete terms and solid information leaked out about the agreement, sharp criticism erupted. However, Hobeika remained, as usual tight-lipped and high-handed.

On October 4, 1985, a new battle broke out between Geagea and Hobeika's partisans. Hobeika was much too close to his goal to let any such event weaken his position towards the Syrians. He overlooked the incident and moved on.

On October 13, 1985, he delivered his plan, in public, for the first time. He bluntly announced that his option was progressive abolition of confessionalism and sectarianism. Amin Gemayel considered it an insult in the framework of a slander campaign to destroy his position on the State level and within the Christian ranks. He had to strike.

Samir Geagea, the Lebanese Forces Chief of Staff, with his regular army of experienced, loyal, high-spirited and anti-Syrian troops knew he had Amin's army on his side to do away with the Accord and Hobeika.

On November 21, 1985, the Lebanese Front political members, having expressed their rejection of the Accord during a session held in Awkar, compared Hobeika to Machiavelli, and accused him of imposing a military regime in the Eastern Democratic Regions. His rule dictated a solution that fitted only Hobeika's ambitions. The political members received a trademarked answer, a boobie-trapped van that went off in Awkar during the meeting resulting in many casualties.

On December 27, 1985, an enlarged Christian Congress called for by Hobeika was held at Bkerke, the Seat of the Maronite Patriarchate. It was held under the chairmanship of the Papal Delegate Monsignor Helou. Hobeika presented the Accord Agreements to the participants as an accomplished fact. It was "take it or leave it", as he put it. He was dead set on carrying it through. The others were dead against it. Geagea tried to obtain a delay with no avail.

Regardless of the all out Christian opposition, on December 28, 1985, the Damascus Accord was signed and sealed in the Syrian capital. Hobeika was warmly received by Syrian President Hafez el Assad, who for the past 10 years had attempted to break down the Christians. Peace was agreed upon in a signed document between the three enemies, and war was on the kerb between natural allies. The damage was done, but we, Hobeika's men did not come round to see it.

Earlier on the way to Damascus, driving in the vehicle were Hobeika, Michel Murr, Karim Pakraduni, and myself. Karim asked Hobeika, "What are you giving Samir in this agreement? How would you deal with Syria about him?"

Hobeika overbearing and full of his own importance answered with a smile, "We are through with Tony, Franjieh, and his feudalism, you want us to hamper ourselves by Samir and his feudalism." This meant his popularity in his Bsharreh hometown. It was clear to me that he was set on eliminating him.

Hobeika had signed his death warrant. He had gathered against him, apart from Amin Gemayel, the Kataeb Party, and Geagea's partisans, the power-base, and the traditional Christian politicians, distrustful and dissatisfied with the concessions made to the Syrian enemy, and dreading a police state run by Hobeika.

On New Year's Eve, 1985, Geagea and Amin, exasperated by Hobeika's arrogance and maneuvers since he signed
the Damascus Accord, decided to get rid of Hobeika. Around 9.30 a.m. on the 31st, pure hatred and cold blooded cruelty was unleashed. Two boobie-trapped cars and a commando force were dispatched to carry out an operation against Hobeika. The operation was indifferent about the dramatic human consequences. Eliminating Hobeika meant killing at least 12 young Christians in the Convoy, apart from innocent citizens

passing. An innocent victim, a wife-to-be, was walking by when the attack occurred. She was killed instantly. Hobeika was not there.

We had driven from Hobeika's house with René Moawad, his brother-in-law, to Junieh to register a piece of land he had acquired. We were delayed till about noon. Assaad Shaftary, his next-door neighbor left home with him, but preceded him to the office at the Karantina, cutting through Nahr Al Mott on the coastal line of the Northern Matn. At the same level coming the other way, a convoy of militiamen were driving up to Junieh to escort Hobeika back to Beirut. They fell into an ambush. Three of the guards were killed, three others badly wounded, among whom my own brother, Ernest.

As we drove back to the office, we spotted thick heavy smoke. I contacted Fadia, Elie's private secretary, to inquire about what was going on. Beside herself with terror, she just shouted "Elie fell into an ambush." She did not know that I was speaking from the car and that Elie Hobeika was safe, by my side. He had escaped the ambush. I hardly had time to reassure her of his safety when she hung up.

We immediately made a u-turn in the middle of the coastal highway, at the level of Aziz Grocery, and drove back home to Adma. We later learned that one of the boobie-trapped cars was supposed to go off before the armed attack, and the second after it, to make sure that Hobeika in his armored B.M.W. would be blown to pieces. The plan did not hit its intended mark.
No sooner had we reached home, than people started pouring in to congratulate Hobeika's escape from the attack. Among the callers were President Chamoun, Father Boulos Naaman, and later in the evening, none other than Geagea and Pakraduni. Hobeika, in his usual self control manner, made the most out of the incident to boost his position.

On January 2, 1986, Hobeika seized all issues of the AL Massira magazine, Samir Geagea's organ and burned them down. It had punched in a cover-photo headline: The Bloody Accord. Strangely enough the magazine's reporters were on the spot just a few minutes after the attack or maybe before it.

Geagea answered back. He stormed Hobeika's Al Joumouria daily paper whose office was located in Amin's stronghold Northern Matn's neighborhood of Mkalles.

On January 13, 1986, the President of the Republic paid an official visit to Damascus. The meeting with Assad was a flop. The Syrians no longer needed him. On January 15, 1986, at dawn, the Intifada was launched. The plan to launch was decided the day before, between Geagea and Gemayel.

Hobeika knew an attack was being prepared against him by Geagea. The question was why he did not let anybody know. The same night, he asked his brother Charles, who was the Commander of all the Intelligence military units, to lift the state of alert and dismiss the boys. So, when the assault was given, Hobeika was in his office with Elie Murr and

Assad Shaftari, eating Lebanese pizzas. The Interior Security Commander Joseph El Asmar was fast asleep.

Just before dawn, one of my men, Zouheir Saleh, picked up one of Geagea's officers, known as Chicken, from Ayn Remaneh and dragged him to the Karantina. He confessed under torture that the assault was scheduled for 6:00 a.m. It was too late. The attack was well underway, it had been pushed forward half an hour.

From Israel to Damascus

CHAPTER 15: January 16, 1986 - Hell at 6:00 AM

All of a sudden, following a sultry and deadly hush, a shower of shells slammed Hobeika's headquarters. The preliminaries of the actual assault was like an attack against the Palestinians in the Two-Year War, but with more sophisticated heavy artillery and weaponry.

Hobeika and Elie Murr ran to the ground floor and hid in Mario's office. News came in that heavy fighting was occurring in Tabarja around the Lebanese Forces barracks and the ATCL Naval Base. There were a great number of casualties already. Adma Barracks, with 150 combatants, surrendered without fighting. The commander, Touma Sueidane, was acted like a coward even though he was responsible for the protection of Hobeika's residence. The whole operation was marked by treachery, cowardice, and miscalculation.

I was in the room when Hobeika, in a fit of rage, desperately throwing his weight about and ordering the boys to keep on fighting. Instead of obeying, the boys fell back. Many fled, dozens fell, dead or wounded. It was a massacre.

Hobeika was, by then, convinced that his Intelligence and Security Group, under the command of Assad Shaftari and the Special Operation forces, had betrayed him. The group included: Gaby Bustany, alias Abou Habib; Mario Simonides; and, Percy Kemp. They were in charge of Security and Intelligence and knew that D-Day was January 15, 1986, at 6:00 a.m. They hushed the information. Pierre Rizk, the triple Agent had managed to buy off the group. Pierre Rizk was later exploited by Geagea to open channels with Iraq and the Palestinians, then sided up with Amin Gemayel and became close to Yasser Arafat.

Hobeika had been warned time and again about betrayal but he did not heed the advise. I would say his own arrogance and underestimation of Geagea and Amine betrayed him. Hobeika's refusal to face this fact brought him down and us along with him. The week preceding Geagea's assault, Hobeika was continuously pressed by his officers to prepare himself for an all out attack. Hobeika cynically replied "Geagea can't do anything!"

Since 1984, Hobeika was obnubilated by his political ambition, contacts, and money. He had delegated his security powers to Assad Shaftari, his man-of-all-trades. It was during that time that Shaftari had been instructed by Hobeika to prepare a Special Force to storm the houses of all of Amine Gemayel's lieutenants and kill 23 of them. There were 70 crack shots from the Security force and 30 shock troops were prepared. The night of the Operation, Shaftary backed out. I never knew why.

On January 15, 1986, at 8:00 a.m., the heaviest fighting took place at Badawi Nahr at the Borj Hammoud bridge junction at the feet of a Casino *le Rouge et le Noir*. The place was between the North Matn Militia commanded by Rashid Gemayel, and Al Amn (Intelligence) fighters. The battle resulted in a great number of casualties.

Michel Zouein, commanding the tank battalion, fought valiantly to open a way for Hobeika to flee but all his tanks were destroyed. Zouein was loyal to Hobeika. Once again, innocent loyal partisans fell for individual ambitions, without even post mortem glory.

Suddenly, at 2:00 p.m. the shelling stopped. Hobeika pressed Toto Breidi for a cease-fire and called up the Defense Ministry. Hobeika had a direct line to the Defense Ministry. He begged General Aoun for assistance to no avail. Michel Murr, was agonizing over his son and wanted him out of the hell whatever the cost. He knew that Samir Geagea and Nader Succar would never let Hobeika and Murr's son out alive. We learned later that Succar's orders were to kill Hobeika inside the building. The Syrians finally intervened with Army Commander General Aoun and Hikmat El Shehabi negotiated his safe conduct to the Defense Ministry against his exile from Lebanon.

Finally realizing he had been defeated, he opened his safe and ordered me to take all of the "Red Files" and burn them myself. He insisted that no one else was to help me. I did what I was asked to do. I did not leave a single paper lying about while the hell continued around me. I was advised that Assaad Shaftari had all of the documents on film which was hidden in a safe at a Beirut bank.

In the early afternoon, Lebanese Army Commander Michel Aoun sent Captain Paul Mattar and his tanks to drive Hobeika out safely to Yarzeh. However, it was Paul Andari, one of Geagea's top ranking lieutenants who entered the building. Andari's orders were strict, no arms were to be taken out. Only Elie Hobeika's close guards were permitted to leave with their individual weapons. Emile Eid stood at the entrance, searching every single person, military or civilian coming out, head down, worn out and despondent. He stole their wallets with their pocket money and personal papers. Emile Eid, later became a leading member of the Kataeb Party politic bureau, and the Party's President George Saadeh's puppet!

Could this be true? Hobeika dethroned? The Shabab dishonored or dead and for what? A dirty battle between the pillars of the Christian Cause, who turned their guns against their respective followers, killing them without compunction or repugnance. What was more, it was not the end of our ordeal.

From Israel to Damascus

CHAPTER 16: Rescued by the Army

I remember as if it were today. The Lebanese Army tanks rolled in, at last, and I realized that the bitter rivalry between the Christian commanders had left us all in the lurch. We had fallen flat and were drifting down, Elie Hobeika, Elie Karam and myself went aboard the first tank of the convoy along with Captain Paul Matar. We were finally safe, but beat. We headed towards the Defense Ministry in Yarzeh as agreed, in full safety. Captain Mattar instructed his soldiers that orders were to be taken from me, Cobra, during the "expedition."

Along the way, we received information that Maroun Mashaalani's men had set an ambush at the Hazmieh Chevrolet junction. Maroun Mashaalani, who was one of the most devoted of Hobeika's partisans, had been bought off by Geagea. By a twist of fate, nobody found it out. It was later discovered that it was Mashaalani who stormed my house one night and claimed I was hiding all of Hobeika's secret documents. They ransacked the house and bullied me. The ups and downs are indeed bitter and biting.

We arrived at the Defense Ministry in an appalling physical and mental condition. The militiamen who chose to accompany us were broken down, some were crying. Hobeika, Shaftari and Murr were shown to Michel Aoun's office. Hobeika had a two-hour long tete-a-tete with Aoun. Karim Pakraduni showed up,unblushing. Hobeika asked him to bring his wife and son from Adma to the Ministry without delay. Paul Ariss, Mario Simonides,

Percy Kemp, Joseph Asmar and Michel Zouein joined us a little later. We spent the longest and most terrifying night of our lives, numb and dumb, incapable either of thinking or weighing the all-out situation or our own fate and future. It was really a tragedy.

When Paul Ariss finished his telephone calls and bags full of cash money arrived, we realized it was the END. Hobeika's
lieutenants, Shaftari, Ariss, and G. Melco Percy, Asmar, Zouein got hold of a bag supposedly to pay off respective elements or at least secure protection for them. Instead, they all, without exception, sent the boys away telling them, in front of me, "That's your look out boys. Sort it out for yourselves."

The money that belonged to the Christians and the Christian cause went into the pocket of a bunch of no-good mobsters fearing neither God nor man. The best example of this was Said Ghantous, one of the most valiant, resistant and devoted fellow in Hobeika's close group. Ghantous was the daredevil who never hesitated to plunge into whatever dangerous and dirty job for his commanders, Hobeika and Shaftari. When he was offered 3,000 Lebanese pounds by Shaftari to get lost, the "Hero" burst into tears. Like Ghantous, many of the boys walked away, head down and surrendered to Geagea.

Although Hobeika pretended to exile himself to Brazil, the real plan was with the Syrians to settle in Zahleh in force. Elie Hobeika was lying as he has always did. He destroyed Christians, civilians and militiamen to remain Abou Jamal's (Khaddam) protégé. When the boys, in despair, kept asking what they should do, Asaad Shaftari confidently replied that we would all rally in Zahleh.

Meanwhile, Lebanese Army Puma helicopters arrived to take us to Cyprus. Aboard, there were Elie Hobeika and his wife and son, Mario's wife and children, Shaftari's wife and son, Zouheir Saleh, Bourvil and myself. We were flown in Rafik Hariri's private plane to the le Bourget airport in France. Gibran Tueni and Hariri's businessman, Mr. El Dada were waiting for us there. Hobeika refused to greet Tueni whom he believed was rejoicing at his defeat. Hobeika and his family stayed at Hariri's residence. We were taken to El Dada's office where we were instructed not to move because it was believed that the Palestinians were out to kill us, to get even with Sabra and Shatilla.

Little by little, about 40 of the Boys joined us and checked into various hotels in Paris while others flew to the United States. Hariri and Hobeika were working on his return to Damascus. The order was soon issued for all of us to leave Paris, without further details as to our destination. We did not know where we were headed until we landed in the Syrian International Airport. Hobeika's family had moved to Switzerland at Hariri's residence with a monthly pocket money amounting to 100,000 Swiss francs. Gina had taken her two sisters and Shaftari's wife along with her, as well as two bodyguards, Touma Suidane and Walid El Zein.

The Syrian President personally accommodated Hobeika with a residence in a luxurious neighborhood of Villa-Street in Mazzeh. We occupied the ground floor. Right on top lived another terrorist, none other than Pakistan's Benazir Bhutto's brother who had high jacked a plane and was evidently on Syria's payroll. On the second floor lived Dr. Jaoudat el Marhi, Rifaat el Assad's former assistant who had changed sides.

Though a six-room apartment, it was appallingly dark, dirty, badly equipped and designed. We spent two months there. Bourvil, Elie Saadeh and I shared a room, Assad Shaftari and Percy Kemp another. Elie Hobeika a room of his own. One room served as Hobeika's office. There was a dining room and the sitting room.

When the 40 Boys finally joined us, the Syrians moved us to the Airport Hotel and then to Teshrine Hotel close to Hobeika's house. The Syrian Presidency, as a mark of consideration, placed at his disposal two black Park Avenue cars for him and his escort.

The Syrian Command had granted him « carte-blanche» to organize his return to Zahleh. And so he did, and we moved back to Zahleh Lebanon, while he remained in Damascus. The Kadri Hotel in Zahleh was evacuated to accommodate the 40 boys who arrived first. Ghazi Kanaan allowed us to take possession of houses and apartments. The military organization started. The Big Chief, for security sake, remained in Damascus and ran every big or small thing from there, omnipresent and omnipotent.

Shaftari was appointed Deputy, Fuad Nassif became the Finance Manager while Paul Ariss in Paris, squandered poor innocent people's money. Nassif having displeased the boss, was soon replaced by René Moawad who disposed of the money arbitrarily. He was high-handed and despotic with us. The money was his, just to have a good time with women.

Hobeika felt the need for a man like Ariss. Hobeika sent for him and hooked the money man. The organization was all set. The administration was entrusted to Touma Suidane, military to his brother Charles, and Joseph Asmar was in charge of Internal Affairs and Security. Louis Abou Khalil, as an expert torturer, became the prison warden. George Sabbagh, alias Abou Ayman, handled investigations and questioning. Michel Riachi and George Kfoury, both university professors were his counsel. Nicolas Maakaroun was handed the Kataeb Party's Office in Zahleh Hobeika's father was appointed Head of the Fourth Section dealing with supplies, food and fuel. The man Hobeika dared describe, in a recent interview to Tele Lumi6re, as a Saint, is nothing but an unscrupulous crook. He laid hand on the fuel and instead of heating us, he sold it on the black market. He barely thought that we were 300 active young men who were supposed to be well fed, well heated and well treated. I remember him saying time and again impudently, "I am preserving my son's money!" Big and easy money, I should say. Rafik Harir used to send him every month, $400,000 United States dollar, in an empty video film boxes stacked in suitcases. I used to pick up the goods from Hariri's residence in Abou Remaneh. Michel el Murr's also sent $150,000 United States dollars monthly payment which Hanna Moussa handed Hobeika personally, right in front of me. We barely cost him $60,000 United States dollars a month. His wife, Gina costs $50,000 per month and the rest went into his pocket and to a Swiss bank.

I recall, his regular trips to Geneva and Paris. When Hobeika could not make the trips himself, he would send his brother-in-law, René Moawad. He had to satisfy his lust for power and the flesh in order to support his luxury mistresses, a vice that showed up at this stage. He needed to fill his secret bank accounts.

From Israel to Damascus

CHAPTER 17: Samir Geagea, Conquering Hero

Hobeika found a release for his political loss and frustration by filling his pockets and his bed in his new ghetto, out of the Christian fiefdom. Samir Geagea, the conquering hero, the victor, set out to reorganize the Lebanese Forces according to his own criterion. A purge was set rolling mercilessly. His objective since then was to form a regular army, capable of promoting and boosting his new Christian ideology, without jibbing. He picked new loyal and staunch recruits, won over to his cause, and to his person. He put aside men like Maroun Mashaalani, and George Azzi who brewed their revenge. Once again, the Christians were at each other's throats!

On August 10, 1986, seven months after Hobeika's defeat, a short lived insurrection movement took place. Besides the two mutineers, Fuad Abou Nader, who was also wronged, was in on it, but undercover. He was never directly involved. The mutiny started with the siege of Geagea's Military Council, and Adonis Barracks in the Kessrouan where two Lebanese Forces men were killed, one of whom was Khattar Abou Jaoudeh. As usual Geagea was absent from Beirut. Abou Nader backed out, and let them down in the middle of the mess, realizing it could not lead anywhere. Machaalani and Azzi had to retract. The men were arrested and charged with having links with Hobeika. Geagea called them "boorish hoodlums" who sowed discord and spread terror. Abou Nader was neutralized, and Machaalani paid off to disappear. The whole thing was hushed.

During the night following the mutiny, an emergency meeting was held at the Kataeb Party headquarters between Geagea, Saadeh, Pakraduni, Succar, Azzi and Abou Nader. Right after the meeting, as Abou Nader was heading home, he was caught in an ambush set up by Geagea. Geagea once again struck a victory. The deadly message was also addressed to Amin Gemayel and the Kataeb Party. It was now clear that the Doctor's goal was to gain control of the Kataeb Party and destroy Hobeika in Zahleh.

The brutal game continued. Hobeika became desperate as Geagea was building up his empire. He had to thwart his plans and move in. He had to reconquer Ashrafieh, Capital of the Christian fiefdom, and where he still counted lots of supporters, specially in Hay el Syrian and Karm el Zeitoun, and the Southern Matn. The January 15, 1986, slap was neither forgotten nor forgiven.

In Ashrafieh, the core of the Christian land the inhabitants lived in fear, all those reluctant to Geagea's command and measures taken against their friends and family members including arrests, imprisonment and assassinations. They would come in handy when the time came to attack Geagea's top level.

Hobeika was incited by the Syrians and thrust by his own greed for power. He decided to reconquer Ashrafieh in order to realize a military victory and a political comeback. He kept saying that he will never accept to be a new Hanash, ousted by Bashir Gemayel from Eastern regions and outlawed there. The breakthrough of September 26, 1986, barely nine months after his capitulation, was decided.

Michel Zouein and five of his top military experts studied the ground. They plotted for a whole month, examining maps of Ashrafieh and the Southern Matn. They opened channels with Walid Jumblat's PSP command to secure a passageway through Souk Al Gharb down to Bdedoun where they counted numerous allies. The night preceding the infiltration seven men, in two cars, drove down to Bdadoun where a scout picked them up and escorted them to Al Kamal building in Gemeyzeh, continuing on Al Assouak. It was occupied by 23 of Geagea's officers on a training session. They were taken by surprise, disarmed, driven to the wall and constrained to let Hobeika's men through. This action open the sealed of the Sodeco crossing, to enable Hobeika's units to move in from the West Beirut Ra's el Nabeh sector.

They were preceded, 24 hours earlier, by trucks filled with some 300 Boys, haphazardly picked up. Hardly half of them were in fighting condition, the rest were gap fillers. Anyone standing on his two legs was considered fit. Hobeika was short of well trained military men and was determined to carry out his plan.

The Boys were told they were going on a training session, not to confront death, and were transported to the Camp in Upper Zahleh. It was just a short halt! Around 3:00 a.m., they were packed into the trucks and taken down to West Beirut through the Al Karameh roadway. They arrived two hours after the scheduled time of the assault, 7:00 a.m. After palavers, the decision was made to continue on with it and send the Boys to the arena.

In the military Operations Room in Elie Hobeika's West Beirut office, Hobeika, Assaad Shaftari, Ghassan Moubayad, and Ghazi Kanaan led the operation contrary to alleged media reports. I was there every minute, watching, listening and wondering. A media report invalidated who was leading the operation. It reported that Hezbollah on our side. In fact, on going through the area they controlled, Hobeika's men clashed with the Hezbollah and suffered three dead. They later claimed we had not taken out a crossing permit.

The second obstacle removed, the Shabab advanced. The Sodeco area was deserted, no checkpoints, no roadblocks, not a soul in sight. The boys swept in and within a few hours, they occupied key positions including the new building of the Kataeb Party Radio Voice of Lebanon on the Hotel Dieu driveway. It was not yet functional. At 10:30 a.m, Lebanese Army planes flew over Ashrafieh as fighting between Hobeika and Geagea's men went on and off. Contrary to all military protocols, the two Christian "Heroes" were out of reach. One was in West Beirut, under Syrian protection, the other in Junieh shielded by his Bsharreh loyalists. The fighting, blood and death were the Boys' affair to handle alone.

By noon, we knew that the Lebanese Army was siding up with Geagea and pounding us despite a tacit agreement with top ranking army officers not to intervene. We learned that it was the President of the Republic Amin Gemayel who was conducting the operation and ordered the shelling. The Boys felt that it was getting too big for them and began retracting, but they were caught like rats, in a trap. The army had deployed Commando Units all over Ashrafieh which they sealed off and set up the Sodeco checkpoint.

Meanwhile in West Beirut, Ghazi Kanaan pressed Hobeika to hold out for a couple of hours more to enable him to send a Syrian Army battalion to the rescue. Inside, it was a stampede. Everyone for himself. Some were trapped in buildings they had taken and were either killed or caught. Less than half of our men returned and with them Charles Hobeika, Hobeika's one and only concern as for the rest, they were nothing but cannon fodder.

He was not concerned for the fate of one of his most and competent lieutenants, since Bashir Gemayel's days, Michel Zouein who had burnt to death in his jeep when a shell hit it in the vicinity of Rizk Hospital. Zouein had been rejected and humiliated by Hobeika until the day he needed his military experience for the Ashrafieh breakthrough. Loyal as he was, he accepted. Zouein died for Hobeika, and Hobeika ignored him.

Hobeika has never cared about such victims as Elie Akl, an honest and brave man whose photograph, dead, was published in Geagea's weekly Al Massira, claiming he was a Syrian. Hobeika did not care when Charles Korban and Loubnan Karam were dragged from the Hotel Dieu Hospital room where, badly wounded, they had been admitted because of Hobeika's egoistic and fiendish mind. Their corpses were thrown in Fidar, Geagea's stronghold.

Geagea for his part, lost self-control, and began sending killing squads to capture and shoot down Hobeika's partisans who had chosen to retire from the field. Michel and Tony Issraeli, and Pierre Haddad, who had been cooped up alone in Radio Voice of Lebanon from early morning till 8:00 p.m, were later captured, and beaten up. Dozen others he considered confirmed traitors were liquidated.

The criminal nature of Geagea and Hobeika was unparalleled Joseph El Hajj, known as Abou Halka, the Hero of Zahleh in 1982, was captured and thrown in a prison created by Hobeika, when he was Chief of Intelligence and Security, with a wide range of the most sophisticated tortures. Geagea considered Abou Halka a competent top officer and wanted him on his side to fill him in on Hobeika's plans. Joseph wanted neither of them. He was banned from his hometown. He was so utterly disgusted and beaten that he endured hell without giving in. Eight months later he was rushed to a hospital half dead. After two months of medical treatment he fled and lived in hiding until he was able to leave the Lebanese territory.

A Lebanese Forces officer, formerly attached to Geagea, Joseph Abou Nader, commander of the South Matn region deserted and fled to West Beirut with his group to join us. We all returned to Zahleh beaten and battered. Hobeika went to Damascus and hardly ever came to Zahleh. We kept a record of the captured, the lost, and the killed and tried in vain to quell the angry families clamoring for their sons and report to Hobeika, imperturbable and pitiless.

From Israel to Damascus

CHAPTER 18: Hobeika's Criminal Activities and the Bomb that Nearly Killed Him

Geagea's long arm finally reached Zahleh. Infiltrators kept us on the alert around the clock, harrying us with time bombs and explosive devices. Hobeika remained in Damascus. Rarely and only for important meetings with Khalil Hraoui, Elie Ferzli, and Monsignor Haddad would he dare show up in Zahleh. I would then go with him back to Damascus, in Elie el Murr's armored Mercedes, which Zouheir drove. His mistress at this point, Marlene Bejjani, was staying, at the Meridien Hotel, at his own expense. His love affair with her was costing him a great deal of time and money.

Our headquarters at the former Fuad Abou Nader's stone-built Base was the target of an explosive charge. I was in Paris with Hobeika at the time. Fady Saroufim was wounded. There were also some slight casualties. The building collapsed as a result of the explosion. Elie's father sold the stones, steam generators and boilers to the Bekaa inhabitants with the help of his chauffeur, Naim Saikali. The money he made was put into his own pocket, without even tips to the boys who watched the operation. The new headquarters was moved to a safer spot on the Zahleh hilltop.

Hobeika was piling up a fortune, presiding over his Mini Republic where everything was under control with Syrian backing and Hariri's money. Geagea was Master of the shrinking Christian empire. To consolidate his authority and power, he itched to give a blow to Amin Gemayel, but he still needed him.

A swindler and a spendthrift, Hobeika lusted for more money. For some reason Hariri had decided to turn off the tap. Hobeika and his lieutenants resorted to other sources of revenue and new means to obtain it. That was when drugs, counterfeit and kidnapping for ransom started on a very large scale.

To begin with, Paul Ariss and Assad Shaftari purchased a printing plant from a Baalbek Member of Parliament, Yehia Shamass. Yehia Shamass was arrested for drug smuggling in 1997. Two experts were entrusted with the job of printing counterfeit United States dollars and Saudi Rials, Adel el Asmar and Michel el Fanni. I needed money desperately, the boys were in straits. We felt we were being had. I first asked Paul Ariss to pay us. He turned me down. In anger, I drove to Damascus to present the problem to Hobeika who pretended he did not know anything about it.

Towards the end of our stay in Zahleh, we had made contacts with Ayn Remaneh. That same night, I called up the middle man from Ayn Remaneh, took some boys with tractors and trucks, emptied the printing plant and drove down to Ayn Remaneh where the presses were later sold for $15,000 United States dollars which we shared.

Assad Shaftari was raving mad, but could not get near me. I had him by the neck. None of us obeyed nor respected him. To us he was a thief, but a cowardly one. With the counterfeit business dead, they resorted to drugs.

Paul Ariss and René Moawad had a common friend, Assem Kanso who had at his Rafss Baalbek ranch, a laboratory to produce heroin. Kanso was known for his big operations. Later Kanso's wife, Boshra Osseirane, would become Hobeika's mistress. He had dropped Marlene, and began to show up in West Beirut to meet her. Kanso could care less. He had his dirty business to deal with.

It was during this time that Rudy Edward Barudy came into the picture. Through his uncle Chico, who had strong links with foreign laboratories, they obtained huge quantities, about eight to nine hundred thousand pills, of Captagon which they smuggled to Saudi Arabia and from which they made a fortune. The real trouble began when they had to split the cuts between Rudy Baroudy, René Moawad, Paul Ariss, Assem Kanso and top flight Syrian Intelligence officers, knowing that the Governor-General of Zahleh was Ghazi Kanaan. At this time, Elie Hobeika had so much on his conscience that he distrusted all of his lieutenants. His objective was to get rid of them. On the other hand, his closest officers were getting nervous, they realized they were being used for no noble cause except Hobeika's forces.

The gambling continued. The two chieftains went on supping with danger, moving heaven and earth to legitimize their seats, unleashing their terrible swift arms to smite each other, playing their Shabab off against each other. Samir with a coherent outwardly regular military force, Hobeika with a bunch of deracinated boys, loyal but totally incoherent if it were not for the Syrian forbearance and backing.

In the Christian fiefdom, Samir Geagea remained immeasurably more acceptable. He was anti-Syrian. They were literally obnibulated by implanting their popularity, and respective hegemony projects. They harbored their spite against each other, brewing their vengeance, whatever the consequences on the Christian community at large, and their loyal partisans who had raised both of them to power. Their mutual bombastic slogans and speeches received no echo, The security of the Christians ABOVE any other consideration sounded more like UNDER every and Halate Airport by all means sounded void and more like a war hatchet that a deliverance.

Geagea, with a strong well trained army of loyalists and a seemingly infallible Intelligence Organism, held Beirut by the neck. He provided important social services including health services, schooling, jobs, public transport and cooperatives. Hobeika was confined in his haunt with some 300 men he held at his beck and call, backed by the Syrians who kept puffing him up with money and dreams of power. He was keyed-up, but crippled by his unpopularity. He was despised by the Lebanese Christians because he had dared side up with the Syrians to crush them and ruthlessly stampeded his co-religionists.

Mutual harassment grew louder and louder with the help of Christians from Zahleh, civilians or religious, who could not forget the horrors committed against them by the Syrians, only a few years before. Explosive charges went off every now and then, until the big day.

Ghassan Touma, Geagea's Chief Intelligence, persuaded Father Samih to stuff a big explosive device at the Bishopric, where Hobeika usually met his allies. Tcluma and Samih coordinated through a transmitter and secret agents. On D-Day, Hobeika had a meeting at 5:00 p.m. with Monsignor Haddad, Elie Ferzli and Khalil Hraoui at Zahleh Bishopric. I escorted him from Damascus and Zouheir and, as usual, drove him in his Mercedes. We first dropped at my apartment, seat of corruption, for a secret meeting with Mrs. Habib El Primo, the wife of the private secretary of Syrian Intelligence Big Boss Colonel Mohamad El Kholi. Hobeika had to get laid before any action.

His loving-making romps were getting him high, so he asked me to put the meeting off to 7:00 p.m. When the time came, Bourvil drove Hobeika and me to the Bishopric in his own car, a Golf to camouflage his whereabouts for security sake. He went up with Bourvil (Fares Suidane), while I stood at the entrance. The meeting had hardly began when Monsignor Haddad received a phone call and just answered, "Yes, he is here."

Hobeika felt uneasy and anxious, and asked who it was. Monsignor Haddad replied, "Father Samih is inquiring if you're here", and the bomb went off. The explosion was so powerful, I felt the sky crumbling on my head. I managed to smash in the Church door and dashed upstairs. I found Bourvil seriously wounded, his face and hands bleeding. His eyes and ears injured. I sent him to hospital in one of the ambulances that had rushed to the premises. I and a couple of boys forced our way through the collapsed pillars and huge brown smoke.

No one was spared, they were all buried under the rubble. Khalil Hraoui, conscious but half covered up, Elie Ferzli unconscious and his face bleeding from a bad cut near the mouth, Monsignor Haddad, his head protruding from the collapsed walls, pointing a finger at the spot where Hobeika was out of sight, buried under the rabbles. I started digging like a mad dog with my paws, until his head showed up. He was alive but hardly breathing.

I and Imad Kassass, one of his close Guards, cleaned up his face and we kept moistening his lips, with my own shirt, until he came to and started to breathe regularly. He grabbed my hand and would not leave it until I set his mind at ease telling him, "Don't worry, chief, I am here, let me get you out." Zouheir Saleh, another personal guard, held his head up, and Walid Challita kept everybody off, at my own instructions, while I was gently pulling him out. The minute news broke out that Hobeika was alive and well, there was an explosion of joy and random shooting.

An ambulance rushed him to Tell Shiha Hospital where I saw to it that nobody came near him, neither the Syrian officials, nor his own family and lieutenants. I set up a tight security belt around him. Finally I allowed two reporters from our private radio station to

get in for a photo and a short statement. "I am alright", Hobeika said, and I sent them away.

The Syrian Command and Michel Murr wanted to make sure that Hobeika had no internal bruises or hemorrhage. They decided to take him to Hafez El Assad's private Hospital, Teshrine, in Damascus. From there, they had planned to fly him to a Swiss hospital. Incredibly, the Syrian military helicopter sent to pick him up could not land because of the heavy random shooting. We had to travel by road. Three ambulances took three different ways for security. We were worn out and edgy, but we had to face the music. One of the ambulances went down through Shtaura, the second through Ferzol, and the third through Masnah border point.

The result of the medical checkup in Teshrine was comforting to Hobeika because the doctor's found nothing but a broken jaw, superficial cuts and bruises. Due to his minor injuries, there was no need to take him to Switzerland. Elie Ferzli, on the other hand, had a serious lip wound caused by shattered glass. When Hobeika came to in hospital, he immediately told me about Father Samih's suspicious phone call. Catch him, he stressed. I sent a unit to the Lazarist Convent where he was staying. He knew we were coming after him and he threw his transmitter in the garden just before we showed up. We arrested him and took him to our headquarters. The Syrians wanted to have him so he was handed over and taken to Anjar where he had a hell of a time. He was terrorized, tortured and humiliated so much so that he shot himself.

I am not priding myself, but if it were not for my rapid action, Elie Hobeika would never have come out alive from Geagea's 50kg bomb blast. He owes me his life, a life of power-seeking and fortune-making, and above all fundamental cruelty and egocentricity. All he could do to repay us was to throw me and the boys in a hell of a fix.

Joseph Asmar was the man assigned to handle all security issues. He turned out to be nothing but a moronic zombie who Hobeika appreciated, because he just could not conspire against him. It was his carelessness and stupidity that caused the blast. Hobeika, who loves to wrap himself up in mystery, surrounded himself with halfwits. Joseph Asmar is now one of Minister Hobeika's closest assistants.

From Israel to Damascus

CHAPTER 19: Asaad Hardane Prepares a Suicide Driver

Elie Hobeika was horror stricken, but not crushed. He was, on the one hand, convinced that the attempt on his life would help him win back his popularity. On the other hand, the Syrians would boost him and help him get even with Geagea, even boot Geagea out of the Christian sector. No sooner had Hobeika regained his health, then he set off his avenging machine.

During 1987 and 1988, Hobeika and the Syrians started preparing their riposte. Retaliation was inevitable. They had to move, quickly, swiftly and decisively. The appetite for violence was at a peak. Boobie-trapped vehicles was the absolute weapon to wipe out all of the Lebanese Forces Christian command Council.

It was on a Wednesday afternoon during the sacrosanct weekly meeting of the Lebanese Forces Executive Council with all commanding officers attending. Barely a month after the foiled attempt on Hobeika's life, H.K. had his inside network of agents operating within Geagea's Christian Command in Beirut's Karantina.

When Hobeika's Amn, the Security and Intelligence mechanism,disintegrated, some of the Boys stuck with Geagea. However, they only held administrative second rate jobs to keep them off the game. At that time, Tony Abou Jaoudeh, alias Zorro, from Ayn Remaneh was Chief of the Licenses and Passes section. His assistant was a friend of Walid el Zein a Moslem Shiat from Ayn Remaneh who had fled with us to Zahleh. Walid volunteered to get in touch with Zorro's assistant who according to his confirmation could be bought. Al Zein contacted him and made a deal with him to issue a special pass for a white Peugeot 504 so it could get into the compound during the meeting without arising suspicion.

The Red Cross ambulance did not need a pass. It was scheduled to arrive right after the explosion and was also fixed with explosives and a suicide driver provided by PPS Assaad Hardane. The plan was to have the ambulance burst out after the first explosion blew approximately one fifth of the Christian areas of Beirut. Cruelty and crime had absolutely no limits.
The two vehicles were boobie trapped in a deserted villa under the huge statue of the Virgin on the hilltop overlooking the city of Zahleh. The vehicles were fitted under the supervision of Assad Shaftari. Plastic explosives, TNT, hexogene, galenite, nails, 120mm mortar shells, domestic gas were not enough for this attack. Boulder, which is powder block, arsenic was added to the vehicles.

Two large jugs were handed over to Hobeika, by Jihad Khaddam, Abdul Halim Khaddam was in Damascus. I personally transported the jugs from Damascus to Zahleh and handed them over to Assaad Shaftari. The bloodthirsty, monomaniacal warlord, Hobeika would not settle with killing Geagea, he wanted no less than a thousand Christian dead along with Geagea. The two vehicles were tuned, the plan finalized and the operation pendent.

Hobeika and the Syria's forbearance was withering away. Something was going wrong. The passes were not issued as anticipated even though the money was paid for their

delivery. Therefore, the operation was put off. This was not to their liking. Walid el Zein, the middle-man, was summoned and questioned. He confessed that the money he was supposed to have given to our agent for the pass went to his own family, no money, no pass, no operation. Geagea suspected the conspiracy, detected the double agent, and increased his vigilance. The plan was canceled.

Walid el Zein, the Shiite Moslem who swindled Hobeika and foiled his plan was handed over to the jailer Louis Abou Khalil and tortured for 20 days. His mother came up to Zahleh inquiring about her son. She stayed at my house, crying her soul out, and cursing Hobeika.

I was in Damascus with Hobeika while Bourvil looked after her. In the end, her son was released and went back to West Beirut to avoid further internal trouble, his mother returned to Ayn Remaneh where she had always lived.

From that moment, Walid El Zein stayed put and inactive in West Beirut. He later managed to patch up his relationship with Hobeika who preferred to deal with his sort of personality! Little by little, El Zein became a big shot. Hobeika could not do without him because he handled all of his secret and dirty affairs. He became his chauffeur, his bodyguard, his soul. In the early 90's, El Zein was converted to Christianity and married in the Church. Hobeika was his best man.

The foiled massacre of Christian people and the treacherous and vicious inter Christian wars marked the years 1988 and 1989. It was the prelude or premonitory signs of the final deadly episode, this time between Geagea and General Michel Aoun, 14 years after the outbreak of The War, in 1975. Now began a series of crushing blasts triggered by the successive Christian leaders, which, in the end struck down and broke up all the Lebanese Christians in 1990.

Earlier, before the end of the Presidential mandate, and by a turn of the tide, Amin Gemayel and Samir Geagea were on a tight rope. Their relations were tense. Syria played on it. Their man remained Hobeika or as a stop gap, Soleiman Franjieh who on Syria's instigation submitted his candidacy to stop the backstage talks. Gemayel had tried to bridge the gap between the Christians and Damascus, maybe for personal motives, he was secretly seeking a second mandate. His action remained hollow. Aoun had sent numerous messengers to the Syrian command and Geagea delegated Zahi Bustany in person. All in vain!

The three Christian leaders who vowed hatred for each other, had raced up, and kneeled down to thrust themselves into the arms of Syria, each on his own, to gain its support in the presidential choice. Syria stalled. The election of its candidate, Michael el Daher torpedoed, and Damascus was adamant on this point, the three antagonists had to join forces, at least temporarily. This move was to eliminate their common adversary, and then supplant each other and in the process,« kill» the Christian people politically and physically with them.

On September 22, 1990, after palavers, shuttles, schemes and intrigues and above all Syria's intransigence, Amin Gemayel's mandate ended and no President was elected. At midnight, Gemayel announced that he was handing the interim government to General Michel Aoun. Geagea, who was at the Baabda presidential palace, played by the rules and with his usual sardonic smile declared to the Media and the people, "Aoun is a man after your own hearts, boys, this is the Independence Government." It was in fact a war Cabinet and warfare solution. Gemayel knew it and like Pontius Pilatus, washed his hands of this affair. The power-base was at its last gasp, hanging by a thread.

Geagea harbored his resentment. He was aware that a military Cabinet was meant to destroy the Lebanese Forces and prevent them from seizing the Kataeb Party, which Geagea was about to realize successfully. He acted swiftly. On October 3, 1988, his men had stormed the Northern Matn, Amin Gemayel's traditional stronghold, took over all military positions and posts, and besieged the newly declared President's private residence. Aoun waited and watched. Amin Gemayel had to leave Lebanon. The two men and their respective institutions were left face to face. The worst was yet to come.

The conflict was political, strategic, and financial. Geagea was determined to safeguard his option and objectives for a Federal State, a Christian entity he would preside over and hold by the throat. Through his "Solidarity Foundation" he had reinforced his ascendancy on the Christian people. Michel Aoun's ambition was growing, and like Bashir Gemayel, sought more power. His war horse was by now a unified state with Geagea out of the way. His final objective was to represent, and speak in the name of all of Lebanon. His strategy was like Samson's, to die with the Philistines, provided the power remained his, with no one to share it. He could care less about the Christians.

To checkmate Geagea and weaken his military position, he set up a Naval Operation room to close down all illegal ports. These ports were one of Geagea's main revenue source. He then outlawed tax levying by the Lebanese Forces, imposed upon the Museum, Barbara and Monte Verde checkpoints and land taxes in Jdeideh and Junieh.

On February 14, 1989, the first clashes erupted between the Lebanese Forces and the Lebanese Army, prelude to the all out war between them. Ten days later, an Accord was concluded for a number of reasons. There was pressure from the the United States of America, France, Iraq and the Vatican. Geagea recanted and apparently yielded to get better prepared to boot Aoun on his own terms, and in his own time.

The wheel turning, many Christian families began to run away to West Beirut, to shun further violence, they had sensed it was bound to explode. They were mostly rich families and businessmen among whom, Roger Tamraz, the man who did not hesitate to put all his wealth for the promotion of the Christian Cause and guaranteed all the supplies of money Geagea's Lebanese Forces needed.

In the meantime, Hobeika kept a low profile, waiting to supplant his rivals in a blood bath, should the need arise. By then, he had moved to West Beirut and shuttled between the Syrian and Lebanese capitals, conspiring and kidnapping for ransom. He was in dire

need of money. The first on his list was evidently multi-millionaire Roger Tamraz, an easy prey, because he was an old friend, and had already opened up on the Syrian and Druze leaders. Walid Jumblat, disheartened and smothered by the Lebanese Forces. Hobeika had a bird at hand.

From Israel to Damascus

CHAPTER 20: I Kidnap Robert Tamraz on Hobeika's Orders

Roger Tamraz knew Elie Hobeika well, but apparently not well enough. Now they had common allies and adversaries and business opportunities. Hobeika was cunning and lustful, Tamraz was shrewd but trustful. The combination was explosive. That is how and why the "Tamraz Affair" happened.

Abdul Halim Khaddam was the manipulator. Khaddam was cruelty personified, and greed made this man. Syria's number two man in command had set out from the very beginning of the war, to bleed the Christians. By the time he had Hobeika as an obedient executor, he schemed to kidnap persons for ransom. Tamraz, one of the richest Christian businessman in the area, open to all, was the right bird. Khaddam incited his arm, Hobeika, to work on Tamraz. The executant gloated and performed!

"Elie, I have a weak heart since I was a child", Khaddam told Hobeika. "I used to faint in Church. Although I have no cash, I have assets and projects through my banks Elie. I have a weak heart since I was a child. I used to faint at Church. I am can longer handle it. I beg of you, give me a second chance in life. I will make it worth your while although I have no cash, I have assets and projects through my banks and we can get cash quite soon. Elie let's consider the event that took place. [It was] God's will he put us together in a period where I could help you and you can help me. We are a compliment to each other to achieve our goal. I [am] sincere."

That was the answer to two messages Hobeika had sent him. Hobeika also sent the message fixing and insisting on the amount of the ransom: Twelve million American dollars! Abdul Halim Khaddam provided the means to pressure and terrorize, even rummaging connections Tamraz had with top leaders in the Syrian Army; specifically, two generals, Adnan Ramhamdani and Ayad Mahmoud.

Grandeur and decline, that was Roger Tamraz's situation nine years ago when, after his flight to West Beirut. He fled to West Beirut to shun growing pressures exerted on him by the Lebanese Forces of Samir Geagea to extort money. Tamraz was kidnapped by the

Syrian backed Elie Hobeika's outlawed dissident Lebanese Forces. It was February, 1989.

Roger Tamraz, a tycoon, businessman and banker had become the object of covetousness in eastern sectors, specially when he set up a Central Bank to serve the financial and monetary needs in the Christian fiefdom. Born, bred and educated in Cairo, Egypt, he had come to Lebanon in the early 1960's and saved Intra and all the companies affiliated with it from bankruptcy. He was enterprising, upright and generous, specially with the Lebanese Christian leaders who, at one time, tried to bleed him dry and he honored, strongly believing in the Lebanese Christian cause.

Tamraz fled to West Beirut and opened channels with West Beirut leaders and the Syrians. He established strong ties with the Druze PSP leader, Walid Jumblatt, whom he helped with TMA shares, the Lebanese Air Freight Co. affiliated to Intra. Jumblatt, in return, coordinated with Tamraz for his personal protection during his stay at the Summerland Hotel. It was then that Tamraz managed to open up with the Syrian command and gain their confidence. The Syrian Defense Minister and Army Commander General Mustapha Tlass had provided him with an official pass to facilitate his moves through Syrian military lines.

In the early 1980's, Roger Tamraz gained, through circumstance, close links with the Lebanese forces, in particular Hobeika's Intelligence and Security Bureau. His contact then was Rend Kehdo Moawad, Hobeika's right hand and brother-in-law. Tamraz, through Moawad had offered Hobeika personally 100 shares in the Casino du Liban and opened a personal credit account for him.

Wanting to open up on Hobeika again, whom he considered Syria's strongest ally of the moment, and a Christian leader, he naturally had recourse to Rend Moawad. Well aware that everything had to be cashed in on, and knowing his greed through and though, he bought a white armored Range Rover and asked him to offer it to Hobeika hoping he would accept it to start business with him.

In fact, Hobeika sensed big money he could extort again from the Lebanese tycoon and accepted to receive Tamraz. To show off his position with Syria's number two man in command, Abdul Halim Khaddam, he accepted to see him, but in Damascus, not at his West Beirut residence. A date was fixed. Tamraz went to Damascus and stayed at the Sheraton Hotel, from where I was sent to drive him to Hobeika's house in the Syrian capital's neighborhood of Mazzd. They met four times at regular intervals and I always drove him back and forth.

About a week after Tamraz return to West Beirut, Hobeika instructed me to set up a plan to kidnap him and submit it for approval. As a most loyal watchdog and underdog I took leave of him and went to West Beirut where I set out to watch him like his shadow for four days round the clock.

I concluded that force cannot be used. We had to resort to guile. The man had a tight proof protection as he shuttled between the Summerland suite and the Verdun apartment he was currently restoring. Tamraz was always accompanied by his chauffeur and a guard. He used to move around either in a dark blue armored Mercedes, or a Honda Accord.

When I reported the information to Hobeika, he decided to lure him into a false secret appointment. We were to tell him he had an appointment with Bassel Al Assad, Hobeika decided. He telephoned him and told him about it and insisted that his own men would pick him up and conduct him to the Bekaa for safety reasons. Tamraz believed him. The operation was set in motion.

As scheduled, I went to the Summerland Hotel with some of my guys and told him the appointment was fixed at 7:00 p.m.. Tamraz dismissed his chauffeur and his guard in full confidence. Zouheir, one of my men, drove Tamraz's own Mercedes. I placed three other security guards with him. I drove the escort car with a man called Bob.

We arrived at my apartment in Zahleh, Salma Touma's requisitioned apartment. We offered him a cup of coffee and bluntly told him he was our captive. Only then did he realize he had been trapped. Though it was ice cold up in Zahleh and no fuel available for heating, we ordered him to take off all his clothes and put all his papers and personal stuff in an envelope. Then I locked him up in the bathroom and put two guys on watch at the door, Samir and Bob. As I had to report to Hobeika in Damascus, I instructed Samir and Bob not to let anyone in during my absence.

Hobeika, trusting no one but me, told me to get Assaad Shaftari and Paul Ariss to conduct the inquiry with him and cut and run back to my house where Tamraz was detained. It was clear that Hobeika and Shaftari had agreed on a specific plan of action to swindle Tamraz. By the time Shaftari and Ariss came to see Tamraz, it was well past 10:00 p.m..

Shivering with cold and fear, Tamraz told them that he was currently in conflict with the Governor of the Central Bank, Edmond Naim. But they could care less. All they were after was cash. He would not yield and they would not give up. The questioning extended till 8:00 a.m.. Tamraz was washed out, hungry, and cold. Nevertheless, I took him back to the ice cold bathroom and locked him up again.

Hobeika summoned me to Damascus where the minute I arrived he gave me a hand-written message which Tamraz had to answer and another one which he had to think over. For two days, Shaftari and Ariss conducted their muscled questioning. Tamraz was firmly repeating, "Money is for investment not for storage. I do not have liquid assets. Twelve million US dollars, this is an exorbitant amount I can't gather." Tamraz also proposed to finance important projects that could breed them fortunes and offer job opportunities. Shaftari and Ariss were adamant. Cash money was their objective.

In despair, Elie Hobeika who was pulling the strings, instructed us to increase pressure by torture and starvation. We obliged. He was deprived of food and water, physically

tortured him with electric waves and ice cold water. He brushed death twice as I was dealing with him. I was in full admiration for his physical resistance despite his age.

I remember in his unbearable agony, he used to whisper to me, "Cobra, these men don't know how to deal with anyone. All they care for is their own interests" or, "Cobra, my biggest problem in Edmond Naim. Ask them to help me find a solution with him. Naim doesn't care a rap about Al Mashrek or other banks in Paris and Switzerland. All he thinks about is my destruction."

In the end, this tough and determined man, crushed by pain, accepted to pay five million United States dollars in cash. He knew he could no longer count on his Syrian friends, nor on Walid Jumblatt. Hobeika had informed him that no one cared and no one would step in to help him. "If he dies, nobody would blame us." Hobeika kept repeating to us, "we will spread it around that he was an Israeli agent."

Fadi Saroufim gave him a bank account number under a false name at the Wedge Bank, Shtaura Branch and a cellular phone to contact his family, friends and business associates. His first call was to his wife in New York. Then he phoned secretary, Noha, in Paris, and his friend Philip Tabet from the TMA.

When the ransom money started coming in, Hobeika and his associates breathed. They gave us instructions to ease the pressure and start feeding Tamraz. It was I, Cobra, who would report to Hobeika, the conversation I had with my captive regarding Edmond Naim. He would not listen. All he wanted to hear was whether the bank transfer had arrived or not.

I have met General Ramhamadani through P. Elie Bitar about three years ago. The object was as Bitar said, to make an investment in Syria for a joint agriculture project 50 percent for the Syrian government and 50 percent for the Mashrek, the capital to be five million. The Mashrek Party was to put up the foreign cash and bring American agricultural know how to Syria, partly to be the local currency required and the land. On my side were a team of three: myself and John Hilken, a United States agricultural expert with whom I had already done a project similar in Egypt; and, Fouad Faral, an accounting expert from INTRA on the Syrian Side.

Bitar never appeared at the official meetings but General Ramhamadani arranged for meetings with the Prime Minister Kasm and with the minister of the economy Al Emadi and with the minister of agriculture. I forgot his name, but it was of Kurdish origin. These series of meetings took place three times during an interval of two months. The meetings ended by signing a protocol agreement, similar to a letter of intent between the two parties. Two points remained unresolved; one which was important and one which also was important but not a condition to break. Al Emadi promised to the two points points agreed upon. One point concerned whether I could use TMA to move the agricultural fresh produce from Syria to Europe while the Syrians were insisting on Syrian Arab airlines.

The money arrived at the bank. Saroufim stashed it in briefcases and handed it to Hobeika for distribution. René Kehdo Moawad cashed $500,000, Paul Ariss and Assad Shaftari, each received $300,000, his brother Charles, Pierre Yazbeck, and his wife, Gina Nashati received $200,000 each. His wife flew to Paris to do her shopping twice. He also kept Zaher and Rabih Al Khatib's Al Mashrek Television afloat. I know that Ghazi Kanaan and Assaad Hardane collected about a million United States dollars each.

Some 25 days later, the full ransom was paid. Hobeika asked me to drive Tamraz back to his West Beirut residence. On the way, he told me that Hobeika did not care about the boys working for him otherwise he would have accepted his propositions regarding economic and financial projects. He stressed that had he been in Europe, he would not have let Edmond Naim bankrupt his banks in Paris and Switzerland.

A short while later, we heard that Tamraz left Lebanon for good. Hobeika implicated me entirely in the kidnapping of Roger Tamraz. What he did not expect though was that strong ties always bind the victim and the hangman. I, Cobra, gained the confidence and friendship of the international tycoon, and we became friends. Moreover, Roger Tamraz sent me and the three boys, Bob, Samir and Zouheir $50,000 dollars which we never received. Fadi Saroufim kept the money for himself.

In the summer of 1989, Rudy Edward Barudy, now Minister and Elie Hobeika's adviser, returned to Beirut and pressed for his share in the loot. Hobeika gave him Roger Tamraz's armored Mercedes. He had falsified the papers in Charles Hobeika's name.

The vehicle was then passed to Joseph Antipa who sold it. Once again, Hobeika's wife received $50,000 United States dollars. Rudy E. Barudy also seized Tamraz's Verdun apartment. However, they left it to the legal owner against $50,000 United Statesdollars, key money.

Hobeika sent me over to Miami, Florida in the United States to buy computer programs and materials. Unfortunately, I was arrested, jailed, and judged as a terrorist there. Hobeika paid my lawyer $10,000 dollars and obtained my extradition. Today, I am still on the United States authorities' blacklist, thanks to Elie Hobeika, who in the eyes of the United States authorities is clean. All his dirty work was done by his underdogs. He took the credit and the money and we took nothing but a bad name, a dark future, poverty and destitution.